

**COHERENCE BREAKS IN FIRST-YEAR ESSAYS WRITTEN BY ENGLISH
SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

by

HAWTHORNE JANICE WATKINSON

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ABSTRACT

Writing coherent essays is evidence of a university student's discourse competence and is important in terms of academic success. An analytical taxonomy of coherence breaks (both topic-related and cohesion-related), based on Wikborg (1985;1990), was used to determine the frequency of coherence breaks in essays written by first-year English Second Language (ESL) students. A subset of these essays was selected for assessment of their holistic coherence (HCR) by raters. The major finding of the statistical tests is that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks, particularly topic-related coherence breaks, and holistic coherence. Furthermore, the relationship between the coherence of essays and marks awarded them was established. Tutor intervention was also found to have had a positive impact when draft and final versions were compared: in general, there was a decrease in the frequency of coherence breaks, and a greater perception of coherence in the final versions.

Key words

coherence

cohesion

reader-based

text-based

coherence breaks

topic-related

cohesion-related

topic control

unspecified introduction

topic drift

English Second Language (ESL)

process approach

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CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER CONTENTS

- 1.1. Introduction to the research project
- 1.2. Discourse competence: cohesion and coherence
 - 1.2.1. The importance of discourse competence at tertiary level
- 1.3. Introduction to the Learning, Language and Logic (LLL) course
- 1.4. Literacy background of the typical LLL student
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- 1.8. Structure of this dissertation

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction to the research project

This research project is a descriptive study, within the exploratory-quantitative-statistical paradigm (Nunan 1992:6), of academic essays written by English Second Language (ESL) students at university where the language of instruction is English. The main focus of this dissertation is on the relationship between coherence breaks and the impressions of coherence in essays written during the first semester at university. A further consideration is the relationship between impressions of coherence and marks awarded for academic performance. Lastly, this study considers the role of tutor intervention, in terms of impressions of increasing coherence and a decrease in the frequency of coherence breaks in final versions of essays.

Proficiency in writing academic text is essential if the student is to succeed at university as, primarily, assessment is based on written work (Lieber, 1981). This chapter introduces this investigation into the nature of *coherence breaks* in ESL university student writing, and the effects of these in terms of the overall clarity of the text and discusses how this, in turn, impacts on academic assessment. As Bamberg (1983: 418) points out, a lack of coherence in an essay contributes significantly to the marks awarded to it.

Coherence breaks evident in essays may be due to problems experienced by the writer, firstly, in managing the topic of an academic essay, and secondly, in using cohesion to signpost the development of the topic and to link related aspects of the text together. Coherence breaks appear to be particularly symptomatic of the written discourse of students whose mother tongue is not the language of the texts they are expected to produce as evidence of their academic progress at

university. A lack of essay writing experience also implies that the coherence of an essay may be adversely affected (Johns, 1990).

General background to the study will focus on the types of 'problems' noted by this researcher in ESL writing - some of which may be considered as *coherence breaks*. Questions asked about the students' literacy experiences prior to university will delineate a profile of the typical student (cf. Appendix A), whose essay writing provides the data for this investigation into the nature of coherence breaks. The aims and justification for this study will be discussed, and the limits and delimitations of this research specified.

In this chapter the importance to the university student of *discourse competence* and what this notion entails, will be discussed first of all.

1.2. Discourse competence: Cohesion and coherence

This study takes the following position:

- * writing coherent text is a *cognitive skill* which develops over time in conjunction with increasing competence in the second language (i.e. the L2)
- * the ability to write coherent text may be related to the student's discourse competence in the second language.

Cognitive academic language ability, or CALP, involves control over the development of literacy as evidenced in language-specific tasks such as writing an essay, language tests etc. (Cummins, 1981 in Young, 1995:67) (cf.2.10.). To be academically competent implies that one demonstrates a certain level of discourse competence.

Discourse competence refers to both spoken and written language and is concerned with *cohesion* and *coherence*: to be understood, the text must

demonstrate a unity of ideas, be coherent, and be structured in an appropriate way. This implies a knowledge of text organisation or the appropriate discourse patterns (Canale, 1983), and the interpretive rules for relating form to function (Coulthard, 1985:147).

An understanding of the cohesive system of English - pronominal reference, substitution, conjunction (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1976) - is most important for the ESL student writer who needs to use lexical and grammatical cohesion devices in context. Cohesion plays a particular role in the creation of unity of discourse as it serves to link one part of a text to another part related in terms of meaning, in other words, the propositions expressed in the text are explicitly linked together, in a logical order and thus 'make sense', i.e. the text is coherent. This implies that the ESL writer must be able to relate a string of propositions to one another in a meaningful and appropriately structured whole. The propositional nature of coherence will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter.

The order of presentation of these propositions is determined, in part, by the topic of the essay, and the weighting the writer gives to specific points in the essay argument. The reader should be able to process the text by following the topic development, as evidenced by the points raised in the argument as expressions of the underlying propositional pattern. The writer can signal the stages in the development of the topic by using topic-organising sentences to control the flow of the topic in specific paragraphs. The logical organisation of the topic, then, is crucial to the coherence of the text. This aspect of coherence will be further explained in the following chapter when we consider the relationship between the planning and the production of coherent text

Discourse competence, therefore, involves knowing how to link segments of the text together to create a meaningful whole. Any disruption to this unity may cause a break in the overall coherence. For example, if the ideas of an essay are presented in a jumbled way this will confuse the receiver, who may find it very difficult to make sense of the message of the text (Pilus, 1996:46).

For the ESL student, facing the writing of academic texts, a lack of discourse competence may mean that s/he will not be able to structure an academic essay in such a way that the reader can construct an impression of coherence. The development of the level of literacy needed to execute such tasks is a separate matter from the language needed to communicate in everyday situations meaningfully and appropriately.

Basically, this research considers how *discourse competence* is demonstrated in student writing in terms of how coherence breaks impact on impressions of coherence.

1.2.1. The importance of discourse competence at tertiary level

Inglis and Kuanda (1996:2) comment that the "ability to articulate ideas clearly is a measure of the writer's conceptual grasp of the material", which implies a close link between one's proficiency in the target language and a thorough understanding of the content, revealed in tasks designed to test the student's academic progress. Lieber (1981) emphasizes that students at tertiary level are mainly assessed as to their academic progress through the medium of their written work: essays, research reports, tests, exams. She maintains that learning the skills of expository essay writing can be a difficult task, and that the most common difficulty experienced by such students is in the use of cohesion to signpost the development of the argument of expository essays by linking segments of text to each other.

Moyo (1985) sums up the problems facing the ESL student writer in South Africa:

- * low proficiency in the target language, e.g. lack of vocabulary, inability to use the passive voice as an indication of the quality of '*writer-detachment*' of the expository text-type genre.

- * lack of familiarity with the *discourse conventions* of English (Moyo 1985: 168-169), e.g. structuring and purpose of introductions, structuring of paragraphs, use of topic-controlling sentences to organise the content of paragraphs, use of cohesive markers to structure the development of the topic thus facilitating overall coherence.

Referring to the South African situation, Hart (1994) reports that the first year students he encounters at university have had very little, or no exposure, to expository writing, and because assignments are the main means of assessment at university, such students are at a great disadvantage. Different disciplines do not necessarily offer explicit instruction to help the novice university student writer. ESL students, in particular, have received "little explicit guidance in writing and experience a limited range of writing varieties" (Hart, 1994:3) prior to entering the academic community. This is further explained in the following section which considers the literacy background of the specific group of students whose essays supply the data for this investigation.

Typically the instruction that such students may receive is confined to narrative/expressive writing. When asked to explain what writing an essay requires, students were aware that essays have a typical structure of 'introduction', 'body' and 'conclusion', but were not aware of differences between introductions to narrative genre as compared to exposition type genre. This understanding of text structure all falls under the notion of discourse competence.

To summarise, discourse competence involves an understanding of the logical development of an essay argument and how this impacts on coherence. To communicate effectively through the written word students must be able to structure their essays in such a way that the reader is able to follow the development of the argument; this draws on competencies in the ability:

- (a) to structure a topic
- (b) to use the cohesive system of English in the services of such topic development.

1.3. Introduction to the Learning, Language and Logic (LLL) course

The data for this study are essays written during the first semester by students enrolled in the course, *Learning, Language and Logic* (hereafter referred to as LLL) at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). Students, who may be regarded as being inadequately prepared to cope with the demands of academic reading and writing, may require the support that LLL offers in these areas (cf. 1.5.1.). Although any student who has learnt English in a foreign country, e.g. Mozambique, Taiwan, is advised to take the course, the LLL course mainly caters for the educationally disadvantaged student in this country and gives them the opportunity to meet the language component of their degree. ESL students, who are reasonably competent in English, as evidenced by Matric passes, are free to take other language courses.

An academic literacy course, LLL is designed to develop confidence in ESL students who need to use English for academic purposes at university, and whose existing skills may not be adequate to cope with the demands made on them in terms of academic reading and writing. For example, students are introduced to argumentative essay writing. Theoretical principles expounded in the course Reader are supported by practical application, e.g. the principles of co-operative learning and leadership styles are experienced first-hand by the students as they apply these insights to their peer group discussions, which again are based on relevant sections in their Reader.

1.4. Literacy background of the typical LLL student of this study

During the first semester of 1996 a questionnaire was administered to the students in my two tutorial groups, whose essays provide the data for this research project. This questionnaire, exploratory in nature, generally asked the student to describe the types of experiences with text, both writing and reading, before entering university. The purpose in asking these questions was to establish the linguistic and literacy background of this group of LLL students. The full report on this questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The Model C school system was in operation from 1991 until 1994, the time the students in the LLL classes in this study were at school. Model C schools were therefore available to these ESL students to enable them to attend English First Language schools where English is the medium of instruction. Such students could, therefore, be expected to be more familiar with the structure of English, and, therefore, could be expected to make fewer coherence breaks in their written discourse when they write their first academic. However, only one student from a group of 34 had attended a Model C school, and only two others had attended a private school where English was the language of instruction, so it can be seen that most LLL students have not attended English medium schools and so could be considered 'at risk' students, in terms of their written discourse competence. Such students are advised by their university counsellors to register for LLL during their first semester at university.

The students were asked about their writing experiences and the following table reflects their responses (cf. table 1). The figures in the top row are weighted categories, e.g. category 1 indicates that essays were never written during the last year at school. The figure in the bottom row indicates how many students indicated that they had written essays, depending on the category concerned. We can see from this table that one student had no experience of writing essays at all prior to his/her essay-writing experience at university. Others had had considerably more essay-writing experience, e.g. two students had written

essays every two weeks, cf. category six. The highest number of students, ten in all, had written essays at least once a term, and as there are four school terms this implies a total of four essays written over a school year. The mean of 3.7 in table 1 indicates that writing experiences fall between categories three and four.

Table 1: Frequency of essay-writing experiences during last year at school

1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Never	Once a year	Exams only	Once a term	Every month	Every two weeks	Weekly	Total	Mean
1	6	1	10	5	2	1	26	3.7

This means that the typical LLL student, in this particular study, has written an essay in English perhaps for examination purposes or perhaps once a term. Unlike essays written for English, essays written for content subjects tend to a more factual (in a sense, expository) style, drawing from work learned in class or from textbooks etc. Students have to systematically present information and, therefore students, who have had this type of essay writing practice (i.e. organising text), may be expected to have some skill in handling essay topics when they come to university.

Table 2, below, demonstrates the typical LLL student's experience of essay writing (i.e. expository text experience). The description, "some experience", (cf. category 2 in table 2) implies that they had written at least one content essay during their last year, i.e. their matric year, at school.

Table 2: The experience of the typical LLL student in writing expository text at school

1	2	Weighting	
No experience in writing content essays	Some experience in writing content essays	Total	Mean
10	24	34	1.7

The results of this questionnaire show that 24 students, about 70%, had had some experience of writing essays for their content subjects. Only two students wrote factual-type essays, once a month, which could possibly constitute "much experience" in comparison to their peers (cf. Appendix A for further details). Ten students, 29%, had had no experience at all in writing essays for a content subject.

Research has demonstrated that students who are good readers tend to write better texts themselves, i.e. they display a greater level of discourse competence. Murray and Johanson (1990: 2) write that

There is substantial evidence to show that reading for pleasure contributes to the development of writing ability. For example, Krashen (1978) found that first year university students who were good writers had read a lot, especially during their high school years.

Furthermore, it can be noted, students who read texts frequently are increasing their opportunities for inductively developing a sense of language structure, as well as increasing their vocabulary, which is very necessary for the ESL student (Johns, 1990). A lack of reading experience at school, therefore, may be expected to impact negatively on the student's written discourse competence. In LLL students are expected to use English and all printed material is in English.

It was important therefore to establish just how much reading in English had been done prior to the reading demands made on them at university. Thirty students indicated that they did read in English whilst at school, 27 of them had read at least one novel and 17 of them had read the newspapers. The relationship between writing and reading skills will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Kaplan (1972, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987:8-12) notes that skills in writing in the L1 are not necessarily transferable from the L1, in this case an African language, to the L2, English. Apart from a lack of focus and organisation, Kaplan says that essays written by ESL learners may lack cohesion and display problems of illogicality and incoherence (Kaplan, 1972, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987) (cf.2.5.1.). Referring to the work of Kroll and Schafer (1978, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987:15), Kaplan comments that they had found that such breaks in coherence were a major error type. An understanding of text structure is, therefore, of great importance to the ESL student at university in South Africa where the language of instruction is English. Thus, the results of this questionnaire indicate that the typical student, who was registered for LLL during the first semester of 1996, had had limited experience in writing expository texts in English and could therefore be expected to make discourse errors of the nature examined in this study.

1.5. Background to the research problem

There is a strong emphasis on essay writing and reading articles, to be used for essay input, during the first semester in the LLL course. During the first semester the students are introduced to expository writing, which is an example of what Martin (1989:15) terms factual writing. The student has to respond to an essay prompt or topic, setting out his/her thesis in the introduction and structuring the argument in the essay body in support of this thesis or point of view.

1.5.1. The approach to writing academic essays in LLL

As indicated above, for many LLL students their experience with expository writing prior to university has been limited; this experience is vital if students are to become more skilled writers in terms of constructing coherent text.

Angelil-Carter and Thesen (1994:585), referring to research conducted by Emig (1971), Perl (1979) and Sommers (1980), revealed that skilled writers used strategies not generally available to the less skilled writers. In an attempt to develop these skills in such writers the *process approach*, as adapted by LLL, seeks to demonstrate to students the actual procedure of generating the final product, i.e. the stages of developing a final essay draft. This approach places emphasis on encouraging students to view writing as a process which goes through a number of stages defined by Coe (1986, in Hart, 1994:4): generating, drafting, reformulating, editing and publication. The approach influences the way the writing tasks are done, careful revising and self- and peer-editing are encouraged, but this is not at the cost of the end-product: students are encouraged to master the techniques of writing an expository-type of essay text. Teacher intervention at every stage in essay production is encouraged but the emphasis is on the coherent expression of ideas, not on the correction of surface errors unless these impact negatively on impressions of coherence. Crucial to this approach is an understanding that one writes for someone to read, so audience awareness is developed. In this way student writers are laying the foundation for coherence, i.e. the text must be accessible to the intended reader (cf.2.5.1.).

In the first term students are introduced to this approach. The various stages of essay production are aimed at enabling them to learn the skills necessary to write coherent text. For example, from topic analysis, to drawing up an essay plan or outline, to making notes from prescribed readings, (for example, Akamajian, 1984; Gulley and Leathers 1977; and John, 1984, and some students may even seek out Widdowson 1984 for the second essay), and then writing paragraphs which reflect the topic, and which are linked to other paragraphs both

in terms of meaning and structure. Finally, this draft is edited with the aim of improving on the overall coherence of the essay before the final draft is written.

On observation, essays written by ESL students for LLL during the first semester (1996) display various types of discourse errors, the presence of which impacts both on the overall coherence of their scripts and on the perception of the quality of the writing, from the point of view of the tutor whose responsibility it is to grade these essays. Errors noticed by this researcher, when marking these essays, include the following:

- * incorrect paragraphing
- * incorrect use of conjunctions
- * incorrect use of pronouns
- * pronouns used with no immediately identifiable antecedent
- * 'wordy' introductions which do not orient the reader
- * claims made with no or insufficient support
- * quotes from prescribed readings which are not integrated into the essay argument
- * abrupt changes of topic which leave the reader bewildered
- * irrelevance of material used
- * lack of focus in a paragraph
- * long paragraphs crammed with details
- * 'conversational' language
- * inability to decide which aspects of the topic should be foregrounded and which should be subordinate
- * abruptly ended essays.

In short, these essays give evidence of poor topic development and control of structure.

1.6. The research problem defined

To reiterate, the purpose of this research project is to analyze particular types of discourse errors, termed *coherence breaks*, evident in the writing of ESL students, and their impact on the impression of holistic coherence by the reader. Furthermore, this project aims to determine the relationship between the density of these coherence breaks and holistic coherence ratings given by experienced tutors in the LLL department. Of further interest is the part played by the impression of coherence in the awarding of marks for academic achievement.

As indicated in 1.5., in the first essay of the year students are introduced to the process approach to writing, and first drafts are checked by the tutor who makes extensive comments aimed at enabling students to improve the overall coherence of their essay. Students are free to utilise these comments or disregard them. Of interest is whether or not there is a decrease in coherence breaks after tutor intervention.

The research problem can be defined in terms of the following questions:

1. What types of coherence breaks can be identified in the essays written by ESL students during the first semester?
2. What are the most common types of coherence breaks found?
3. What is the relationship between coherence breaks and coherence ratings?
4. Does the presence of certain types of coherence breaks impact more negatively on coherence ratings than others?
5. Is there a link between the coherence of an essay and the percentage mark allocated to it?
6. Has tutor feedback on the first draft of essay 1 served to reduce the number of coherence breaks in the final draft?

The research hypotheses which flow from these questions are presented in Chapter 3: Research Methodology. Basically, the hypotheses posit a relationship between the *frequency of coherence breaks*, both **topic-related** and **cohesion-related**, and *holistic coherence ratings*. For this researcher, a major interest is an examination of the essays to see if the final version of an essay displays fewer coherence breaks than the draft version.

1.7. The basic rationale for this study

The guiding assumption of this research project is that coherence involves the creation of overall meaning in the text. Coherence may be **text-based** or **reader-based** (Johns, 1986: 249-251) and this will be further explicated in the following chapter.

This study attempts to demonstrate, from the literature and from student papers, *variables* in a text that contribute to the facilitation of global coherence, which in turn, contributes to higher academic assessment.

This study seeks to explicate the nature of *typical* coherence breaks made by ESL students when writing essays, in which an argument has to be presented in English, in response to an essay topic or prompt will be the focal point, i.e. coherence breaks which are text-based and which affect the impressions of coherence when reading the essay.

This research will also consider the impact that coherence breaks make on the academic assessment of ESL student writing as this has a major bearing on their class and year marks. In this regard, support will be given for the contention that discourse conventions governing topic development and the usage of the system of cohesion need to be taught to ESL student writers as these work in the service of creating global coherence in a text.

Of further interest are the potential insights from this research for teachers of academic writing to ESL students. Such students frequently have had little experience of writing their own expository text prior to entering university and may tend to make discourse errors of one kind or another when they first write their own text. Various writers, for example, Johns (1986; 1990), Slater, Graves, Scott and Redd-Boyd (1988), and Swales (1990), maintain that ESL students need to be taught explicitly about the various *discourse conventions* which govern English expository text. Discourse conventions would include a knowledge of the English system of cohesion and how this is used to structure the argument of an essay and to link sections of text together in the creation of overall or global coherence (cf. 1.2., 2.5.2., 2.6.).

1.7.1. The aims and justification of this study

This study has both a theoretical and a descriptive-applied linguistic focus. At the theoretical level it seeks to explicate the notion of coherence and the extent to which impressions of coherence are affected by the *frequency* and *type* of coherence breaks that occur in a text. As the study compares both draft and final essays of the same students, it is also of interest to see if essays improve in coherence as a result of tutor input and further drafting and editing by the student.

This study will also examine the question of how impressions of coherence may influence the awarding of marks for an essay. For example, if a writer has stayed on topic would there be a tendency for such essays to be awarded higher marks than those essays which develop the topic in a less direct way? Furthermore, at the descriptive-applied linguistics level, the focus is on the identification and explanation of specific coherence breaks in the expository (factual) writing of first year English Second Language (ESL) students in their first semester at university.

1.7.2. Limitations and delimitations of the study

There are some issues to be considered in generalising the results of this study to other student writer populations in this country. The population from whom the writing samples were obtained are first year, ESL students whose mother tongue is an African language. The students comprise two tutorial groups registered for LLL. Their writing experience prior to entering university has been limited as the questionnaire results confirm. Students who have had more experience in using English for academic purposes may not make the same type of discourse errors or to the same extent, as evidenced by the student writers of this study.

Furthermore, data collection is from the first semester only, and excludes the essay written for examination purposes, as this was written under different conditions to that of the tutorial room or in the student's residence.

With the exception of one external rater, raters were from the LLL department and were familiar with the readings prescribed for the essays and this may have influenced their expectations of the essay content. However, the inclusion of an external rater was designed to offset the effects of such expectations on the holistic coherence of the sample essays.

A further delimitation is the selection of essays. Essays are drawn from three sets: the first draft and final draft for the first essay topic written during the first term; and the final draft for the second essay topic written during the second term of the semester.

1.7.3. A comparison of Wikborg's study and this present study

The purpose of Wikborg's (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990) study into the coherence breaks in essays written by advanced EFL Swedish university students was firstly, to define and classify types of coherence breaks, and, secondly, to

determine their relative frequencies. This approach parallels the purposes of this study.

Wikborg used a sample of 144 papers taken from five academic disciplines at the University of Stockholm; she does not indicate whether these were first or final drafts. This present study has used a corpus of 100 essays, written by 34 students all from the same department, for the overall descriptive analysis, and essays drawn from this total comprise the sample groups of the draft and final versions of the essays.

In Wikborg's study writers ranged from first-years to graduates, in this study all writers are first year students. All the essays in Wikborg's study were in Swedish except for those written by students in the English department. She did not improve on the style of the essays but spelling and elementary grammatical errors were corrected. All the essays used in this study are in English, and aspects of style, spelling and grammar have been left untouched when quoting from essays when discussing the results of the descriptive analysis.

The two primary sources dealing with coherence breaks, used in this study, are the articles by Wikborg (1985;1990). In these articles Wikborg considers "Unspecified topic in university student essays" (Wikborg 1985) and "Types of coherence breaks in Swedish student writing: Misleading paragraph division" (Wikborg, 1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990).

1.8. Structure of this dissertation

Chapter 2, the Review of the Literature, considers differing views on the notions of coherence and cohesion from the fields of applied linguistics and education. This will include a presentation of the historical background of coherence studies and ESL writing, particularly expository text. Then we will focus on coherence breaks (topic-related and cohesion-related) and in this regard, consider Wikborg's

(1985;1990) research on the nature of coherence breaks and suggested taxonomy and its application to this present study.

Chapter 3 will focus on the research process itself: purposes, objectives, hypotheses, the subjects, the data and procedures followed, including the methods of data analysis.

Chapter 4 will present the findings of the descriptive analysis of the students' essays, supported by textual examples of coherence breaks, according to their descriptive categories and the results of the statistical analysis on the various hypotheses. For example, the correlation between the various types of coherence breaks and firstly, the assessment of holistic coherence in the three essay samples AD (first essay - draft), AF (first essay - final) and BF (second essay - final); and, secondly, the awarding of academic marks. A further consideration will be the influence of tutor intervention leading to a greater sense of coherence in the final draft of essay topic one, as compared to the first draft. These findings and their significance will be discussed.

Chapter 5 will further discuss the implications of the findings of the statistical analysis for ESL academic writing, in terms of the analytic framework used in this study, with a specific focus on topic-management. In this regard, the application of the analytical framework, as a guideline for ESL teachers, particularly those who may be ESL speakers themselves, will be discussed. It is hoped that in this way, they will be able to inform their ESL students of possible strategies they could implement in their own academic essay writing, in order to create more coherent text, especially during their first semester. Finally, the limitations of this study will be considered, and suggestions for further studies into the nature of ESL writing made.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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- 2.2. Cohesion and coherence
- 2.3. Features of coherent text
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CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

As the concepts of *cohesion* and *coherence* are central to the issue of making meaning in interaction, whether spoken or written, there is a need for these two different - but interrelated - concepts to be defined. For the purposes of this review of the literature, the focus will be on those studies which address **coherence** and **ESL expository text**, for example, academic essays, and the role played by **cohesion** in the construction of text.

One of the main tenets of this study is that the ability to write coherent text is linked to the writer's **discourse competence** in the target language, discussed in sections 1.1. and 1.2. This chapter intends to take that argument further by referring to Cummins' (1981) proposal that Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is an important aspect of language proficiency or competence for the ESL student writer (Young, 1995:67, in Heugh, 1995). For example, the writing of an effective academic essay, it may be argued, is dependent on the writer's academic language competence, or CALP (cf.2.10).

As this is a study which focuses on the ESL writer, aspects of culture need to be considered, albeit in brief. Writers like Swales (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990) and Johns (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990) have suggested that coherence is a cultural phenomenon. This implies possible difficulties facing the ESL student, which warrants a section devoted to this point of view.

In order to lay a foundation for the reader the essential features of coherent text will be considered before the notion of coherence breaks is introduced. The nature and types of coherence breaks will be further explicated in 2.9., and in the following chapter which relates more directly to this present research study.

The taxonomy of coherence breaks, as outlined by Wikborg (1985;1990), forms the main input for the analytical framework used in this study on coherence. An introduction to Wikborg's model will close this chapter.

2.2. Cohesion and coherence

There appear to be two main interpretations of the term *coherence* according to the literature on Second Language Teaching. At times these two key terms, *cohesion* and *coherence*, are used interchangeably in the literature, particularly in the literature of the early 80's and late 70's. For example, McKenna (1987:3) contends, "the concept of coherence is not understood and is frequently confused with the concept of cohesion". Kintsch (1983, in McKenna 1987:149), notes that "Sometimes a distinction is made between 'coherence' and 'cohesion', the latter being used to account for the more specific grammatical manifestations of underlying semantic coherence".

In order to clarify the notions of coherence and cohesion this section will briefly explain three theories related to coherence:

- * cohesion theory
- * schema theory
- * interactive theory.

Cohesion has been defined as "a property that a text possesses" (Swales 1990:187). *Cohesion theory* (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1976) is concerned with how transitions in text are cued by the use of cohesive devices. In this review the taxonomy of cohesive devices, as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), and their use in student scripts as evidence of well organised text, will serve to explain the role of cohesion in facilitating text-based coherence (cf. 2.6.).

Schema theory is concerned with the role played by the reader (cf.2.5.1.). According to this theory of reading, all pre-existing knowledge is stored hierarchically in the brain in cognitive structures called schemata (Langhan,

1993:8). In the process of interpretation "every input is mapped against some existing schema" (Langhan, 1993:8). Early theorists on coherence, De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), had suggested that coherence is based on "a continuity of sense among the knowledge activated by the expressions of the text" (in Connor & Johns, 1990:1). This activation takes place during the process of reading and involves drawing upon the reader's frames of reference to make sense of the text (cf. 1.5). From this point of view, coherence is an "interpretive process" (McCarthy, 1991:26). As one reads the text one forms an impression of the overall coherence of the written work, and in doing so one is drawing upon one's intuitions of what a coherent text should be like (cf. Lieber, 1981).

This notion of coherence is supported by Swales (1990:187), for example, who sees coherence as "a property that a reader ascribes to a text", i.e. reader-based coherence.

Phelps (1985:22) explains coherence according to the *interactive theory* of discourse which sees coherence as both dynamic and static. In terms of this theory coherence is both a property of the text (i.e. static - text-based) and a property ascribed to the text (i.e. dynamic - reader-based). Being a property ascribed by the reader to the text involves the reader's judgements on what is coherent and what is not (Phelps, 1985:21). Coherence is viewed as the outcome of the reader's interaction with the text and the reader's frames of reference, which play a specific role in this interaction, in terms of background experience with the content, expectations of what should be in the text, and how the text should be structured etc. The design of the text serves coherence in that its organisation expresses the propositional content of the essay. Connor and Johns (1990:1) point out that "a certain number of surface signals in discourse are necessary for the ease of processing".

Enkvist (1978, in Connor & Johns, 1990:1,2) sums up the views of researchers of varying opinions, according to Connor and Johns, when he says:

If text is to be well formed, it must have semantic coherence as well as sufficient signals of surface cohesion to enable the reader to capture the coherence ... The general rule is that every sentence of well-formed text must have a cross-reference to at least one other sentence of that text, and there has to be an overall coherence involving the text as a whole.

Enkvist's view has been influential in guiding this present study. Essentially the purpose of text is to communicate to the reader (Inglis & Kuanda, 1996:6) and this objective is only realised if the text is coherent. Coherence, therefore, is seen as involving text-based features which include cohesion and topic organisation, and reader-based features which involve the knowledge of the topic that the reader brings to the text, as well as the reader's understanding of how an essay should be structured (cf. Moyo, 1985), in terms of the functions of its various parts, e.g. the introduction. The interaction of these different aspects leads to impressions of a coherent text. This will be considered in more detail in the following section.

2.3. Features of coherent text

In this section we shall consider the roles of *topic* and *cohesion* in facilitating the *coherence* of a text. Johns (1986:250) refers to Grabe (1985) who, in his review of text linguistics literature, cites three features which in their interaction are crucial in facilitating coherence:

1. a discourse theme or thesis (usually indicated in the introduction)
2. a set of relevant topic propositions which relate logically among themselves through the processes of subordination, coordination and superordination
3. a system of topic organisation in the text which is indicated by various features including cohesion.

Other features which could be included in #3 above, include the given-new principle (Cooper, 1988) and the use of topic-controlling sentences which can serve to keep both the writer and reader focused on the topic development.

As indicated, topic development plays a significant role in the creation of coherent text. Van Dijk (1977), (in de Beaugrande, 1981), reasons that a piece of writing starts with a main idea which gradually evolves into detailed meanings of sentence-length stretches of discourse which thereby express the topic of the discourse.

Lautamatti (1986) explains that the development of topic within an essay serves to lead the reader through the text. The organisation of the discourse and how one proposition, reflected in one part of the text, allows the interpretation of other propositions, which relate semantically to each other. This semantic whole, or semantic coherence, is built up carefully by the writer, facilitated by topic support. For example, the writer may add new information in the form of exemplifications and elaborations, to that which has already been given. Topic support, according to Witte (1983) and Connor and Farmer (1985, in Johns, 1986:250) is a most important feature of a coherent essay.

With reference to #3 above, the use of cohesion also facilitates coherence. Halliday and Hasan (1976) define a coherent text as one which has ties between sentences manifested by cohesive devices (in Johns 1986:248). By using *cohesive devices or ties*, the writer links the development of one proposition in the text to another *related* part of the text; in other words, what is given already is linked to what is new by cohesive markers with resulting unity or coherence (Pilus, 1996; Lautamatti, 1986, in Johns, 1986:249-250; Enkvist, 1987, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987).

The role of the background frames of reference, or schema, which the reader brings with him to the text, helps him negotiate the *meaning* of the text and in this way the text becomes coherent if the expectations in the mind of the reader

as to the content, are either fulfilled or modified. This implies a process of continuous interaction with the text in an effort to achieve interpretation (cf. 1.5., 2.2.). To bridge gaps in his/her understanding, the reader makes *inferences*, stemming from his/her knowledge of the world and how it works. By relying on his/her understanding of the *cohesive devices*, which signpost the relationships in the text, to predict what the text is about, and so the reader is able to negotiate the meaning of the text. By keeping the *intended reader* in mind, the writer can provide relevant and sufficient clues in this way for the reader to follow. According to Armbruster and Anderson (1984, in Johns, 1986:251) a "reader considerate" text is one where reader expectations are met and progress through the essay is guided by cues in the text itself.

2.4. Introducing the notion of coherence breaks

Although Wikborg's (1990) taxonomy of coherence breaks will be discussed in 2.9., in order to follow this review, it is necessary *briefly* to define the term **coherence break**. If the reader cannot understand the relationship of one part of the text to another, or to the larger whole, a coherence break could be the contributing factor (Wikborg, 1985:360). Wikborg (1990) draws from Widdowson (1978) who maintains that "... a text is coherent when a reader understands the function of each succeeding unit of text in the development of its overall or global meaning" (Wikborg, 1990:134). In other words, for a text to be coherent, the reader needs to understand the purpose of each unit of text, e.g. a quote from source material. If this understanding is not reached, coherence breaks of one kind or another, viz. topic-related or cohesion-related, could be responsible. For example, perhaps the writer did not:

- * identify the topic
- * order and link propositions in a systematic manner
- * provide topic support in the use of relevant content
- * consider the needs of the reader
- * provide cohesive ties (or too few of them, or has used these ties incorrectly), e.g. lexical cohesion, reference, conjunction (Bamberg, 1984:318).

So far this review has suggested that cohesion and topic control can work together in the creation of coherence. For example, coherence is established when there is evidence of referential tracing of the argument throughout the essay (McCagg, 1990:22, 23), which can be signalled explicitly by the use of cohesive devices (Enkvist, 1987, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987:29). Breaks in coherence, then, can be *reader-based* and *text-based* (see 2.1.2. above, and 2.2. to 2.6.). The ability to handle an essay argument, which draws on both text-based and reader-based aspects of coherence (Johns, 1986:251), can be seen as an indication of academic language proficiency.

In conclusion, *coherence breaks*, for the purposes of this study, may be attributed to two main sources - structuring the *topic* of the essay and/or creating links between parts of the text by drawing on the system of *cohesion* in English.

2.5. An overview of writing instruction

As indicated above, writing instruction in the ESL classroom is informed by insights in research which impact on the notion of the various acceptable *academic conventions* which govern the structuring of text. Writing teachers aim to make these conventions explicit to their students so that they can develop into more proficient writers.

As stated in 2.1., impressions of coherence in text, and therefore coherence breaks, are inherently *intuitive* and therefore *subjective*. This subjectivity will be considered further in 2.9.4.

The following sections will focus on different approaches to the teaching of writing from an early focus on form, to an understanding that writing is about the creation of meaning, to a new appreciation that form does play a role in creating coherent text, especially with regard to expository essay writing.

2.5.1. Form, meaning and coherence

In the sixties, writing classes focused on the *form* of the language, i.e. the formal linguistic features, with a tendency to consider applications like cloze exercises at the sentence level and grammatical forms which mirrored the applied linguist's concentration at that time on the sentence. Instruction in writing lessons, at school and in the ESL class at college, tended to be prescriptive and formulaic. The *interactive* nature of written text (Connor & Johns, 1990), regarded as most important by later theorists who were concerned with the *interpretive process of creating coherence*, was not considered to be as important as the correct form.

However, from the seventies onwards, greater attention was paid to *connected discourse*, or chunks of meaningfully connected writing. But writing exercises were still tightly controlled and did not encourage genuine processes in the generation of meaningful texts (Raimes, 1991). If *meaning* is to be recovered by the intended reader, the writer, therefore, must pay careful attention as to how s/he structures an essay, i.e. a concentration on text-based features of coherence.

A concentration on text-based features implies that the writer must ensure that his/her text is accessible to the intended reader, e.g. using conjunctions to cue the reader to the structure of the essay argument. Compared to oral communication, written text makes different demands in terms of more elaborated and more structured communication. The writer from an oral language background may find that this involves a grammar of discourse which differs considerably from that of spoken discourse (Kaplan, 1987, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987:15). In an attempt to account for this, Kaplan (in Connor & Kaplan, 1987:9-10) advanced the notion of *contrastive rhetoric*, commenting that

It was my experience that students in ESL programs, who were brought to the level of proficiency necessary to the writing of texts, wrote texts which were different in important ways from the texts written by native speakers of English ... one kind of difference occurred at the syntactic

level; ... there are differences at the level of the discrete sentence and even at the level of the phrase and the word. The interesting distinctions occur ... at what I have decided to call the rhetorical level; i.e. at the level of the organisation of the whole text. There are ... important differences between languages in the way in which discourse is developed in terms of exemplification, definition and so on.

Although Kaplan (1987, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987:11-12), maintains that all of the various rhetorical modes are possible in any language which has a written form, certain languages have preferences for specific forms. His insights on cultural patterns of thinking and their impact on text arrangement stimulated renewed interest in rhetorical form. Text organisation which is considered appropriate in one culture may not be regarded as appropriate in another. The role of the reader and the reading process became increasingly a point of focus, i.e. a consideration of reader-based features. For example, the writer needs to consider the reader's possible pre-existing knowledge, and the reader's expectations of what constitutes an *appropriate form* and therefore a coherent text (cf. Clyne, 1981; Carrell, 1984; Connor & Kaplan, 1987; Connor & Johns 1990).

From the mid-seventies there was greater interest in the *writer* and the *writing processes* (cf. 1.5., 1.6.) involved in the *creation of meaning* (Lieber, 1981:11). As the ideas of the writer became increasingly important, as opposed to correct form, so writing took on a more interactive aspect and was viewed as an act of communication between the writer and the reader of the text. This stemmed from a new understanding of reading, the schema approach (cf.2.2.). In terms of this approach "meaning is not fully present in a text, waiting to be decoded. Rather meaning is created through the interaction of reader and text" (Langhan, 1993:8). What the writer needs to do is provide cues or "directions for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct intended meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge" (Langhan, 1993:8). Writers, therefore, were encouraged to consider the reader as the intended audience of the text (cf.1.3.)

and thereby to make the text *accessible* to the reader, with the result that there was a greater consideration of reader-based coherence.

However, in order for writing to communicate effectively, the ideas had to be organised in a meaningful way - topic organisation now assumed a more prominent role in writing instruction. Enkvist's (1990) view was that surface cohesion works in the services of reader-based coherence (Enkvist, 1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990:17-22) (cf.2.2.).

This understanding led to teachers encouraging their students to view writing as a process (cf.1.5., 1.6., 2.2.), which goes through a number of stages defined by Coe (1986; in Hart, 1994:4) as generating, drafting, reformulating, editing and publication (cf.1.5.1.). This approach encourages teacher intervention at every stage of the creation of meaning. The actual *content* of the final product, the essay, is considered more important than a focus on the form, as was the case in the previous era of writing instruction.

The process approach to writing can lead to more coherent text (cf. 2.3.). For example, Zamel (1983) considered the writing processes of students from varied language backgrounds - Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew and Persian. She found that all of the students, irrespective of their writing skill, read over the written sections in an evaluation of whether the form of the essay correlated with their intent: form was regarded as a vehicle for conveying the intended meaning (Zamel, 1983:173-174, 178). Zamel reported that more skilful writers develop strategies that focus on the development of their ideas (Zamel, 1983:175). Any changes made were frequently global as students sought to clarify meaning, and so seemed to be aware of *reader expectations*. In other words, they were aiming for semantic coherence in terms of unity of meaning (cf. Pilus, 1996), also referred to as overall coherence (c.f. 2.3.).

The result of the implementation of the process approach to writing is an understanding that coherence needed to be taught "comprehensively" (Johns,

1986:251), taking both text-based and reader-based approaches into consideration.

2.5.2. Coherence and expository text

Johns (1990) implies that notions of coherence are embedded in the genre concerned, a point emphasized by Leki (1995:24,25) who comments that assumptions about what constitutes good writing are subjective and may be dependent on the discipline concerned. This would appear to support Moyo's (1985) suggestion that the ESL student, when entering university, is typically unfamiliar with the conventions governing academic discourse, and is thus at a disadvantage when attempting to engage in academic debate, which includes academic essay writing (cf.1.2.1.).

Expository text is a specific genre, a characteristic form of academic essay writing. As a communicative act the goal of expository writing is to explain the writer's position in response to an essay topic (McMurrey & Campman, 1983). The relevance of any support, quotes from prescribed reading, must be evident to the reader.

Analytical expository text makes specific demands on the writer in terms of the structuring of the argument, or discourse theme, in response to the essay topic. For example, the writer needs to understand the *functions* of the various *moves* in topic control which encourage the creation of coherent text (cf. section 2.3). Different writers refer to the structuring of the argument using different terms, for example:

- * framing move (cf.2.9.2.)
- * referential tracing (cf.3.4.5.)
- * expectations and counter-expectations re propositional content (cf. 3.4.7.)
- * larger thematic organization where the writer signals the overall thematic organization of the discourse (cf. 3.4.7.).

In his analysis of the introduction of an essay, Hyland (1992:7-8) considers the various functions of the sentences - sentences 1 and 2 are termed the *information move* and supply necessary background information on the topic; sentences 3,4 and 5 state the writer's position and set the boundaries of the topic, a compulsory move termed the *proposition move*. In an introduction, these moves are necessary to orientate the reader to the discourse theme and as such lay the foundation for an impression of coherence.

Bamberg (1994) notes that essays which receive high holistic coherence scores orient the reader to the discourse topic in the introduction, either directly, or by supplying sufficient context for the reader to understand what the essay will focus on.

Wikborg (1990), for example, found that *unspecified topic* constituted 8% of all **coherence breaks** in her study (cf. Chapter 3).

2.6. Cohesion and expository text

Although this present research is concerned with breaks in coherence caused by problems related to cohesion it may be necessary to determine what *types* of cohesion tend to be more evident in the expository-type essays which serve as data for the descriptive analysis of this study.

Hubbard (1993), for example, examined reference and conjunctive cohesion in student answers to examination questions on Linguistics and English literature. The findings revealed that the *density of conjunctives* in a text is more relevant to an overall appearance of coherence than the density of reference expression, in other words, *the more conjunctives the writer used the more coherent the text seemed to be*.

In her taxonomy of coherence breaks, Wikborg (1990) refers to the category of *malfunctioning cohesive ties*. A cohesive tie may malfunction if the relationship that is signalled "is not borne out by the actual semantic relations established by the propositions" in the text (Wikborg, 1990:134). In this present study this category of coherence break is referred to as unclear/incorrect conjunction.

2.6.1. Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (1976), contributed significantly to the field of text analysis when they introduced their taxonomy of the cohesive system of English - researchers now felt that they could isolate the components of coherence. The role of cohesion in creating text-based coherence in an essay is considered by Wikborg (1985, 1990) in her study on coherence breaks.

As Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy of cohesion has been the basis of much research, reference is made here to its essential features, necessary for this present study. Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out that cohesion is a *semantic relation* between elements in the text, the one depending upon the other for its interpretation. As Halliday and Hasan (1976:299) note

Cohesion expresses the continuity that exists between one part of the text and another ... The organisation of each segment of a discourse in terms of its information structure, thematic patterns and the like is also part of its texture ... But the continuity adds a further element that must be present in order for the discourse to come to life as text.

All components of the semantic system are realised through the lexicogrammatical system, some forms through the grammar and some through the vocabulary. There are five "different kinds of cohesion" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:303): reference, substitution and ellipsis (all grammatical); lexical cohesion (open-ended, but with the criterion that the choice of an item must relate to

another which occurred previously in the text); and conjunction, "on the borderline of the grammatical and lexical" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:303).

Conjunctive items, for example, are cohesive because they express meanings (the propositional structure of the text), which can only be interpreted in the light of other elements in the text. These are defined as "a specification of the way in which what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:227).

Halliday and Hasan drew categories of ties from a total group of 19. These include reference and conjunction which are considered in the taxonomy of coherence breaks posited by Wikborg (1990) and this discussion will focus on these at this point.

2.6.2. Reference

This term is used by Halliday and Hasan (1976) to include those cohesive relationships which are signalled by the use of personal pronouns like him/her, his/hers, it/its, they/their/theirs. Reference may be anaphoric or cataphoric. For example, the pronoun used in the following example, refers to the antecedent noun referent and as such is anaphoric:

Small groups have great value in the context of the university. For example, they provide opportunities for students to freely exchange their views on a topic.

If the pronominal reference is to nouns which are to follow this is termed cataphoric reference, but this is not usual in expository-type writing and is more characteristic of narrative writing. For example:

It stretched its long back, and scrambled onto the high wall, joining its fellow members of the midnight choir. Drawing a deep breath it started the screeching chorus. Jake, the alley cat was home!

If the reader cannot track the referring item to its referent a coherence break is the result.

Demonstratives, such as this/that, these/those and the definite article the serve to identify particular text segment relationships. For example:

This is not the only method available in the university. Those advantages, previously discussed, should be considered alongside various disadvantages, these include the following factors.

Other reference relationships may be signalled grammatically. For example, the use of comparatives such as same, identical, similar/similarly, such, other, different, else, more/less, as many. These may be used as an adjective or comparative as in:

Lectures may provide more information than a small group discussion in a short space of time. Small group learning has value in that ideas are discussed in more detail as students put forward and defend their own ideas on a learning topic. So, although lectures take less time there is also potentially less learning by the student.

A coherence break can result if the writer starts a paragraph with the phrase, more or less, and there is no preceding discussion or subsequent discussion to logically indicate its use. The reader is then confused as to what aspect of the topic is being referred to.

Relationships in the text may also be signalled lexically. For example, the repetition of the same or a closely related word including inflections or derivations not necessarily with the same meaning or referent, i.e. lexical items which repeat/refer to the underlying semantic notions, e.g. teach, teacher, student, school, educator, college, tertiary training. A lexical collocation involves words which are frequently used together and how they can be used. A simple example

of collocation could be education, teacher, school, student, and pupil. However, as Johns (1990) points out, ESL students do not usually have an extensive vocabulary, which is necessary to form collocations, so this aspect of lexical reference has not been considered in the taxonomy of coherence breaks in this study.

The use of synonyms or near synonyms, hyponyms and lexical collocations also creates cohesion which is lexically based. For example, hide and conceal are words which are similar in meaning, i.e. synonyms. Hyponymy can be exemplified by table, chair, and furniture - the meaning of table and chair is implied in the word furniture as both are examples of furniture. Furniture could also imply nouns like table and chair as well as other items like cupboard and stool. If these are used incorrectly by an ESL writer this may indicate insufficient vocabulary at the disposal of the writer (Johns 1990).

2.6.3. Conjunction

Conjunction plays a specific role in textual relations as this is "... associated with different threads of meaning at different places ..." (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:227), and thus indicates the *structure* of the argument: because of this aspect in expository writing, the use of conjunction has been considered in the taxonomy of coherence breaks.

Halliday and Hasan (1976:238) view

conjunctive relations ... (as) ... textual; they represent the generalised types of connections that we recognise as holding between sentences. What these connections are depends on the meanings that sentences express, and essentially these are of two kinds: experiential, representing the linguistic interpretation of experience, and interpersonal, representing participation in the speech situation.

This review will focus more on relationships expressed in text. Halliday and Hasan suggest a scheme of four conjunctive categories which are *additive*, *adversative*, *causal* and *temporal* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:238).

Halliday and Hasan (1976:233-234) discuss the use of and to coordinate between two pairs of items, e.g. two noun phrases as in 'men and women', where the and serves to mark a structural relationship. They prefer to use the term *additive* to express a more semantic relationship than a structural relationship, commenting that "the additive relation is cohesive" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:234).

Additive relationships may be signalled by words like and, also, and furthermore.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976:250)

The basic meaning of the ADVERSATIVE relation is 'contrary to expectation'.

The conjunction but is a typical example of an *adversative* relationship but according to Halliday and Hasan (1976:237) also carries "the logical meaning of 'and'. But usually projects backwards in the text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:237) referring to some previously mentioned idea, e.g. "It was hot all week but on Saturday it turned cold".

Halliday and Hasan (1976) include the contrastive relationship with the adversative but indicate a difference in meaning, as the example from their book shows:

a. She failed. However, she's tried her best. (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:252).

They contend that if however is substituted by yet there is a significant change in meaning, "it means 'in spite of the fact she's tried her best she still failed'"

implying a contrastive relationship (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:252). They maintain that there are adversative relationships 'proper' (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:255) as well as contrastive relationships of various types.

Both adversative and contrastive relationships may be signalled by words like yet, though, only, but, and however, conversely, instead, on the contrary, at least, or rather, anyhow.

An understanding of how to indicate contrastive relationships is important to the writer who has to respond to an essay topic which calls him to compare and contrast the advantages of small groups, for example, in the learning situation at university.

Causal relationships generally express a reason followed by an effect (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:256-257). The ability to signal causal relationships by the use of words like so, therefore, consequently, in consequence, for, because, arising out of this, then, as a result is also important in marking topic development. For example:

Working in a small group can give members a chance to participate by expressing their points of view, which must be supported by reference to the prescribed readings which supply the background content for the discussion. Consequently, effective interaction in small groups can result in effective learning.

The first sentence supplies the reason as to why small groups can be beneficial to the learner. This result is signalled by consequently and demonstrates how conjunctives work to create textuality.

Likewise, the ability to handle *temporal* and summation relationships as signalled by then, next, just then, hitherto, finally, to sum up, soon, in conclusion are also

important in terms of indicating topic development, for example, indicating the end of an essay:

In conclusion, it has been shown that whilst small groups do have disadvantages for learning at university, the advantages outweigh these in terms of increased participation of group members in the discussion and a more thorough understanding of the topic as all points of view are aired.

In the final section of their chapter on conjunction Halliday and Hasan (1976:267) note that they aim to

bring together a number of individual items which, although they do not express any particular one of the conjunctive relations identified above, are nevertheless with a cohesive force in the text. If necessary these can be referred to simply as CONTINUATIVES.

They explain *continuatives* as applying to speech and which fulfil "a backward-linking function" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:268). When applied to text they fulfil the function of continuing the thought or idea that is being developed (cf. Fahnestock, 1983). A continuative relationship is indicated by now, of course, well, anyway, after all, surely and can also play a role in signalling the organisation of the essay topic.

2.6.4. The role of cohesion in creating coherence

It is the continuity provided by cohesion that threads the propositions of the text together and which "enables the reader or listener to supply all the missing pieces, all the components of the picture which are not present in the text but are necessary to its interpretation" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:299). In this way cohesion may be said to facilitate coherence. The following discussion will focus on various studies which consider the contribution that cohesion makes to the coherence of a text.

The relationship between the use of cohesion and evaluations of holistic coherence was the focus of research conducted by Harnett (1978, in McCulley, 1983). The findings of her study indicate a moderately significant correlation between the total number of cohesive ties and holistic evaluations. However, the correlation between the types of cohesive ties and holistic evaluations was of high significance, which demonstrates that certain cohesive ties are indicative of more highly rated text (McCulley, 1983:63), and therefore of a more developed academic language proficiency. Harnett (1978, in McCulley, 1983:63) suggests that "Good writing may need a wide variety of attention ties ...". These ties are various cohesive markers such as personal pronouns, demonstratives, and the repetition of lexical items, synonyms and collocations.

In their research, Witte and Faigley (1981) focus on conjunctive elements which create textuality by expressing certain meanings which can only be obtained by referring to another part of the text, thus leading to a sense of unity of ideas in the text. Five essays rated the highest holistically by two raters on a 4 point scale and five which received the lowest rating were analyzed according to the number and types of cohesive ties, as well as other criteria. The more highly-rated essays were found to display a greater density in cohesive ties than the lower-rated essays. Witte and Faigley (1983:201) note that there are "a variety of coherence conditions, many outside the text itself" and that cohesion and coherence do "interact to a great degree" (Witte & Faigley, 1983:200). Witte and Faigley conclude that in the creation of overall coherence the writer must organise his/her text to relate to the reader, and have a clear purpose - texts must have both cohesive and pragmatic unity if coherence is to be achieved.

Neuner's (1987) research compared good and poor essays written by first year college students. The essays of forty students on a single topic served as a data base on which to examine the types of cohesive ties used, (after Halliday & Hasan, 1976), the relative distance between precursors and coherers (cf. Eiler, 1979), the mean length of cohesive chains and the diversity and maturity of the vocabulary used within the chains (Neuner 1987:94-95). It was found that

cohesive chains (lexical collocations, reiterations, synonyms, superordinates and pronouns) are more evident in good essays (Neuner, 1987:100). Such cohesive chains serve to connect elements within the paragraph or relate parts to the whole essay and this makes for impressions of coherence of the whole.

Linked to cohesion is word choice by the writer. Essays written by good writers reveal a more sophisticated choice of words with longer chains which provide a sense of connectedness (Neuner, 1987).

Conversely, essays which tend to rely on a dominant chain, e.g. reiteration of topic and pronouns, frequently referred to by markers of essays as 'repetition', which indicates little topic development, indicate a poor essay writer (Neuner, 1987:100). This suggests that if a writer uses pronouns to indicate referents in the development of his/her essay, topic without clearly indicating the referent in the text, there could be a break in coherence. This could be the result of what Wikborg (1990:134) refers to in her taxonomy of coherence breaks as *misleading sentence connection*, which accounts for 16% of the coherence breaks she notes in her study. Misleading sentence connection may be manifested in the following cohesion-related problems:

- * incorrect use of a conjunction,
- * an incorrectly used pronoun,
- * an uncertain pronominal reference or demonstrative,
- * too great a distance between the pronoun used and its antecedent (Wikborg, 1985), (cf.2.9.).

The main impact that Neuner's findings have on this discussion, concerning the link between the use of cohesion and coherence, includes the following:

- * essays which demonstrate an interrelatedness of meaning also use more, and a greater variety of cohesive devices

- * such texts are also seen as being more coherent and are thus rated more highly than other texts.

In his study of 23 essays written by African mother-tongue speakers at university, Hubbard (1987) found that some errors in the text made the reader's task in making a plausible interpretation for an incorrectly used cohesive item difficult, but not impossible. However, when there was ambiguity in the cohesive item used, or no reference or relation, *interpretation* could not be realised. He concludes that although there are many studies that have shown that cohesion and coherence are not the same, "(T)here is no doubt that cohesion errors will tend to affect coherence adversely ..." (Hubbard, 1987:9,10).

2.6.5. Cohesion and continuative/discontinuative relationships in a text

Adding to the insights into text cohesion developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) (cf. 2.6.3., 2.6.4.) Fahnstock (1983) proposes a taxonomy that considers the specific cohesive effect of continuative and discontinuative relationships. The value of Fahnstock's (1983) taxonomy of continuative and discontinuative relationships is that it highlights the *logical* structure of text development which facilitates *text-based coherence*. The cohesive devices, which signal continuative and discontinuative relationships in the development of an essay argument, may be considered part of the resources a skilled writer uses in laying the foundation for coherence and as such, evidence of a high level of academic proficiency.

Fahnstock (1983) proposes that two sources of coherence, lexical and semantic, work together in the creation of global coherence (1983:411). For example, coherence could result from the relationship of writer's cues in a text, for example conjunction, to the semantic structures which are arranged hierarchically. As noted in 2.6.3., conjunctions serve to explicitly signal *transitions* in text, and therefore indicate textual relationships (1983:402). If there are missing cues in the surface structure, the reader can *infer* meaning by

linking 'given' propositions to 'new' propositions. Fahnestock emphasizes that it is the writer's responsibility to bridge the gaps between adjacent clauses in such a way that the reader can follow the relationships between the clauses, sentences, and paragraph.

These relationships may be continuative or discontinuative (Fahnestock, 1983:411). Continuative relationships reflect the *continued* development of the writer's thought. For example, to show a similarity in facets of an argument the writer may use the words likewise, to indicate a premise the word because or since may be used. The sequence of information presented may be indicated by then or next. A restatement is shown by that is, in other words, or, in short.

Discontinuatives signal that the writer is 'changing direction'. For example, to present a contrasting point of view (relationships of replacement, exception, concession, denied implication and contrast) the writer may use but, however, yet, nevertheless. The relationship of *concession* may be signalled by even though and *replacement* by rather or instead. An *anomalous* relationship by earlier and an *alternation* by or otherwise (Fahnestock, 1983:409).

Discontinuatives, it can be argued, are important to the rhetoric of argumentation and exposition. In his study on discontinuative relationships in expository writing, which draws upon Fahnestock's taxonomy, Hubbard (1993) comments that more proficient writers seem to use these relationships in their essay argument and to signal them more effectively.

However, discontinuative relations pose the greatest problems for the *reader*, as negative statements are processed more slowly than positive (Fahnestock 1983:405). If relations are marked semantically (i.e. a 'nameable relation') coherence is achieved when the reader is able to utilise these ties to link the parts of the text.

2.7. Writing coherent academic text

We now need to consider more closely the strategies, introduced in section 2.3., which the writer can use in order to produce a more coherent essay, for example, topic analysis and planning the essay (Murray & Johanson, 1990). This section also serves to lay the foundation for the discussion on topic-related and cohesion-related *coherence breaks* which concludes this chapter.

2.7.1. The relationship between planning and the production of coherent text

Impressions of coherence are created in the mind of the reader. Therefore, one of the first considerations the writer needs to make is to ask - Who is my reader? (cf.2.5.).

Then the writer needs to *plan* the essay. This process contributes a great deal to impressions of the coherence of the final product. Meyer (1982) notes that an essay plan focuses the attention of the writer on what s/he wants to say and how s/he will organise the presentation of this argument. This, in turn, will assist the reader to follow the development of the *topic* as presented in the essay argument, i.e. the *content* of the essay. The writer's plan, then, is "... a set of directions about how to present one's materials" (Meyer, 1982:37).

A relationship between the essay plan of the topic and the ultimate coherence of the essay can be suggested as they play "... a crucial role in assuring the interpretability of a passage" (Meyer, 1982:38). Carrell (1984), also found that the organisational plans of essays tended to lead to more coherent and understandable texts. The lack of an organisational plan can lead to coherence breaks. For example, Bamberg (1984) found that writers who have no organisational plan, and either list or follow an order of association, tend to receive low scores for holistic coherence.

So it can be seen that both the *form* of the essay and the *content* are important considerations in writing a coherent essay and can facilitate both text-based and

reader-based coherence. This will be discussed further in the following sections which focus on the relationship of topic development and breaks in coherence.

2.7.2. The role of topic in facilitating coherence

Wikborg (1985) found that there is a relationship between topic development and coherence breaks. In fact, topic-related coherence breaks (unspecified change in topic/topic drift and unspecified topic) accounted for 18% of all the coherence breaks in her study (Wikborg, 1985:361) (cf.2.9.). She notes that a text should have a main topic, i.e. "a proposition to which all the other propositions in the text unit relate" (Wikborg, 1985:362).

Meyer (1982) suggests that students should be given explicit instructions in identifying the various types of plans which are available to the writer, who may gain insight by applying these to his own writing as a self-analysis. Signalling the stages of topic development indicates that the writer has used an organisational plan. The link between cohesion, coherence and the underlying propositional structure has been discussed in section 2.6.4. Wikborg (1990:134) has found that failure to *signal* effectively via the use of cohesive devices leads to **breaks in coherence**.

Witte's (1983) study focuses on the relationship between revision and topical structure at the level of the sentence, and at the level of the whole discourse, i.e. the effect of revision on the writer's final product. In the revisions, the amount of information was decreased from the original scripts and the numbers of words reduced correspondingly (Witte, 1983:327). Whilst the lower-scoring students tended to keep to their original phrasing, the more highly-rated students reduced the length or phrases or transformed the draft. The more highly-rated writers reduced the number of topics from their original drafts via a process of selection, based on whether or not the topic was essential to the discourse theme, and were able to develop these more fully than lower-rated writers, who did not appear to have this facility for the selection and development of topics. This

meant that lower scoring writers tended to exhibit less of an ability to focus on the topic than more highly rated writers with a resultant loss of coherence.

Low scoring writers failed to achieve either local or global coherence because of their inability to select and order topics in relation to the overall discourse theme (Witte, 1983:331): they demonstrate what Wikborg (1985:366) says is an inability to develop a "governing topic which would pull together... [the] ... threads of the discourse ..." and the reader is left wondering as to what "... is the writer's main point?".

2.7.3. Introductions

Introductions serve to orient the reader to the discourse theme, or topic, of the expository essay. An effective introduction leads to the impression of coherence and so writing effective introductions is a most important essay writing skill. Establishing the topic theme of the discourse engages the reader's attention and helps the reader to identify the theme (Scarcella, 1984:678). Failure to do so results in low impressions of coherence (Bamberg, 1984:318). Wikborg (1985:360-361) notes that the coherence break of *unspecified topic* accounts for 8% of the coherence breaks in her study.

Scarcella (1984) found that the ESL writers in her study wrote longer orientations, which involved the use of various clarifying devices, than non-native speakers (Scarcella, 1984:682). She suggests that it is plausible that in all languages writers are expected to orient their readers but "the means by which this goal is accomplished probably vary from language to language" (Scarcella, 1984:683). English mother-tongue speakers, for example, use fewer topic clarifying devices. She suggests that deficiencies in ESL writing may be due to a lack of composing skill which besets less proficient writers, whether native-English speakers or non-native English speakers (Scarcella, 1984:681). For example, she (1984:676) found that English speakers generally "captured their readers' interest in the very first sentence". Scarcella further notes that ESL

writers tend to downplay the importance of their topic themes and suggests that this could be attributed to "cultural differences in the use of politeness" (1984:678).

Swales (1990:204) comments that as an ESL writer cannot be expected to meet the register and grammatical expectations of a native speaker/reader so it becomes very important for them to explicitly signpost their text. Unlike the problems in orientations noticed by Scarcella (1984), in the writing of ESL students, Swales noticed that difficulties were created by lexical deficiencies which leads to an inability to use paraphrase (Swales, 1990:205). Connor (1984) cites similar findings in her research, namely lexical redundancy resulting from a limited vocabulary range (Connor, 1984:307).

This study also considers the relationship between impressions of coherence and marks allocated to the essay concerned. Tedick and Mathison (1995) found that higher holistic scores were received by ESL student writers who had framed their essays well. From this it can be suggested that there is a link between the coherence of a piece of writing and the marks awarded to it when it is graded. Scarcella (1984:671) notes that

Students who are unable to write effective introductions on essay examinations often experience academic failure in universities in the United States.

2.7.4. Conclusions

Conclusions also work in the services of developing the topic in that they bring the argument to a close. Bamberg (1984:318) notes that the skilful writer of text which has the highest holistic coherence rating, 4, "often concludes with a statement that gives the reader a definite sense of closure". Conclusions may be of various types but essentially conclusions serve to "conclude something" (McMurrey & Campman, 1983:222). Failing to create this sense of closure in the mind of the reader can lead to a coherence break as the reader relies upon the

conclusion to bring the different strands of the topic together in a satisfactory whole.

2.8. Operationalising the constituents of coherent text

One of the objectives of this present research study has been to indicate the effectiveness of Wikborg's (1985;1990) taxonomy of coherence breaks which could be used to alert ESL teachers to potential areas of weakness in their students' essays.

Couture (1985) contends that any model of linguistic behaviour, for example an essay, must have descriptive, explanatory and predictive power to be operational as an analytical tool. A full range of classification categories that adequately describe the observed linguistic behaviour must be included.

As this study seeks to operationalise factors which impact negatively on the impression of coherence the reader gains when reading an essay, this review will consider research conducted to assess *coherence in student writing* (cf.2.8.1.to 2.8.3.). For example, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in the United States of America was concerned about the coherence of student essays and their results were the focus of research conducted by Bamberg (1983;1984). Another researcher, McCulley (1983:3) (cf.2.6.4.), argues that *coherence*, as evidence of *writing quality*, needs to be operationally defined.

2.8.1. Isolating cohesion as an aspect of coherence

McCulley (1983) refers to NAEP's studies on the assessment of coherence as evidence of writing quality in student essays. NAEP defined the concept of coherence as "resulting primarily from the number of cohesive ties rather than from the combined effect of sentence- and discourse-level structures" (Bamberg, 1984:308). In other words, the emphasis was on local coherence effected by cohesive ties.

NAEP had perceived a decline in coherence in writing nationwide, from the first study conducted in 1969-1970 to the second of 1978-1979 and sought to explain why (Bamberg, 1984). In an effort to better describe the role played by cohesion as evidence of writing quality NAEP initially considered the Halliday and Hasan taxonomy, later discarding it as being too time-consuming for their purposes and opted instead for a primary-trait scoring system which describes, in general terms, the range of cohesion evident in student scripts from 1 to 4. A score of 1, for example, would reveal little or no evidence of cohesion. A coherent script, rated as 4, would display a "sense of wholeness" (McCulley, 1983:64), but this 'wholeness' was primarily attributed to the number and variety of cohesive devices which linked sections of the script and therefore bound the script together into a cohesive whole. The part played by syntactic repetition (cf. McCarthy, 1990) and general statements, which organised the whole text was deemed significant in facilitating coherence. But the NAEP study noted, that "Cohesion does not necessarily lead to coherence" (McCulley, 1983:64).

However, Carrell (1982) questions the notion that coherence is the *outcome* of cohesion in an essay. Rather, she contends, *cohesion is the result of coherence* as the linguistic resources of the language have a specific role to play in the creation of coherence (Carrell, 1982:486). For example, conjunctives, serve to link related aspects of the text together, the presupposed item and the presupposing item, and in so doing facilitate the creation of coherence. However, these can only play their part because they are manifestations of the underlying semantic configuration of propositions, made evident by the surface markers of cohesion, which are the major contributors to coherence (Carrell, 1982:480-482).

McCagg (1990:31-32) asserts that coherence is also established by the relationship/s between the propositions of the text. Cohesion may result in local coherence but not necessarily in overall or holistic coherence. For example:

I bought this typewriter in Durban. Durban is a large city in KwaZulu Natal. Large cities often have serious housing problems ... (own example).

The *lexical ties* above do not result in global coherence because the text lacks an underlying semantic or propositional structure which relates all the propositions (Bamberg, 1984:307; van Dijk, 1980:49,54).

McCulley (1983:71) concludes that cohesion is a sub-element of coherence. The findings of his study suggest that most of the textual cohesion frequencies assess elements of coherence, thus implying that overall coherence is more than cohesion although cohesion plays a significant part in the creation of coherence (McCulley, 1983:153,155). He posits that the results of his study confirm Bain's (1966, in McCulley 1983:1,154) conceptualisation of coherence as a significant element of writing quality.

Couture (1985) posits a systemic model for analyzing text quality based on *semantics* and not on syntax. Such a model attempts to answer the question posed by Winograd (1972, as quoted in Couture, 1985:72) - "*How is language organised to convey meaning?*" Couture argues that *thematic unity*, which contributes to coherence (Pilus, 1996:45,47), controlled by the writer and perceived by the reader, distinguishes texts which are highly valued from those which are not (Couture, 1985:68). McCagg (1990:31) points out that thematic organisation is crucial if a text is to be rated as coherent. Explicit signalling by discourse markers can signal levels of text organisation and serve to indicate the relationships within the text, *text-based coherence*, to the reader thus facilitating the accessibility of the text and subsequent *reader-based coherence*.

Texts more highly rated thus could be said to reveal a network of interacting factors in the service of meaning: "... complex meaning is never resolved in a single word or phrase but through longer semantic structures that cross or intertwine with others" (Neuner, 1987:101). This implies that good writers are

able to handle the development of the topic in their essays. They are able to relate parts to each other, and cohesive devices serve to link these parts of the topic. However, these studies have demonstrated that cohesive devices do play a significant role in organising the flow of propositional content in the text. A student writer, unfamiliar with the role played by these devices, might well produce texts which exhibit text-based coherence breaks.

2.8.2. Assessing holistic coherence

This section serves to explain, in greater detail, how the *holistic coherence* of an essay is assessed as this is one of the research tools used in this study (cf.3.3.). In this regard we consider the study undertaken by Bamberg (1983;1984). In a further examination of the essays used in the NAEP study, Bamberg (1984) developed the Holistic Coherence Scale. This scale was based on linguistic and discourse theory. The initial framework of linguistic features was drawn from van Dijk (1977; 1980) and Halliday and Hasan (1976). A subset of the NAEP essays was drawn and graded according to four levels of coherence. These categories were further explicated in terms of the features of coherent text and ratings allocated to each category on a 4-point scale. For example, a fully coherent essay would receive a holistic coherence rating of 4, whereas an incoherent essay would be rated as 1. Bamberg's scale has been used to assess the impressions of coherence in the essay samples in this study (cf. Appendix B, pages 184-187; and 3.3.).

2.8.3. Positing a model for analysis

To summarise, the *thematic unity* of an essay, also referred to in this study as the discourse theme, leads to impressions of coherence (Couture, 1985:68). This sense of topic unity (cf. Pilus, 1996) may be text-based or reader-based and needs to "be explained in a model of writing quality as a *linguistic* function distinguishing texts that are highly valued from those that are not" (Couture, 1985:68). Such an analytical model should explain why some essays inspire a favourable response from the reader whilst others do not.

Enkvist (1990:26) suggests that if we are to model textual coherence we must focus on a process model (cf. 1.5., 1.6., 2.2., 2.3., 2.5.) which considers situation and context. This involves the schema of both writer and reader. In his paper, Enkvist deals with various problems in the study of coherence and interpretability of a text. If the essay can be understood, i.e. it demonstrates interpretability, it is coherent.

One of the fundamental starting points of McKenna's (1987) research was an acceptance of the definition of cohesion and the limitations as put forward by Halliday and Hasan (1976). She suggests the following premises:

- * coherence is different to cohesion
- * cohesion is a text-bound property of language, as defined by Halliday and Hasan
- * coherence encompasses both text and a world knowledge base of the text user (cf. schema theory).

The focus of McKenna's (1987) study is to determine if some independent variables are more highly related with impressions of coherence than others. This study adopts a similar approach. If coherence is an extra-textual property in the making of meaning, it could be the result of the interaction between reader and writer, in other words, coherence is the impression of unity of ideas in a text (Bamberg, 1984; Johns, 1990, text-based vs reader-based coherence; Pilus 1996).

The results of McKenna's research indicate that cohesion is one aspect of text that may contribute to a strong measure of coherence, but that other factors which lie outside the text need consideration, e.g. the intent of the writer of the text (McKenna, 1987:126,227).

2.9. Wikborg's taxonomy of coherence breaks

Couture (1985) suggests that any model which seeks to account for the effect written prose has on the reader should meet three criteria:

- * it must be an analytic examination of text as directed, multifunctional social interaction
- * it must demonstrate how texts achieve thematic or topic unity
- * it must explain how formal items relate to reader response (Couture, 1985:68).

Couture stresses that an analytic framework needs a full range of classification categories that should adequately describe the observed linguistic behaviour. The significance of the pattern which allocates this observed behaviour, viz. *coherence breaks*, to a specific category and the potential of this pattern to be repeated in similar circumstances is also a crucial component of such a model.

Wikborg's taxonomy of coherence breaks is used as the analytical framework for the descriptive analysis of the essays in this study. This framework attempts to describe both the linguistic features of the text and the effect of the text on the reader and as such has the *descriptive, explanatory* and *predictive power* which it needs to be operational as an analytical tool.

In justifying her taxonomy of coherence breaks, Wikborg says that:

Coherence break is the term I use for what happens when the reader loses the thread of the argument while in the process of reading a text attentively (Wikborg, 1990:133).

Wikborg (1985;1990) distinguishes between topic control and cohesive devices used to effect that control as evidenced in a coherent text. Wikborg (1990) determines two main types of coherence breaks: *topic-structuring coherence*

breaks and *cohesion-related coherence breaks*. The following list presents the taxonomy of **topic-related** coherence breaks indicated by Wikborg (1985:360):

- * Unspecified topic.
- * Unjustified change of/drift in topic.
- * Misleading paragraph division.
- * Irrelevance.
- * Misleading ordering of material.
- * Misleading headings.

The final category of coherence break, *Misleading headings*, does not apply to this study as headings are not used in LLL essays.

Wikborg (1990, in Connor & Johns 1990), gives three examples of coherence break which are topic-related:

- * when two equally brief paragraphs elaborate on the same topic;
- * when a break in a paragraph separates a topic sentence from one or two sentences which develop this topic;
- * when a new paragraph marking a shift in topic is too short to establish itself as an independent topic (Connor & Johns, 1990:4).

Wikborg (1985:359) presents a "working definition of topic" according to three criteria: hierarchy, development and function. In terms of hierarchy she differentiates between sentence topic, used for noun phrases, and discourse topic which she defines in terms of whole propositions usually explicated by sentences (1985:361). She uses the term *topic entity* to refer to the main topic of the essay. In this study this is referred to as the *discourse theme* or *overall topic*. The role of the reader in judging the coherence of the text is thus important for this particular study on coherence breaks. The reader may lose the thread of the writer's argument for any number of reasons:

- * the writer has not specified the topic
- * there is a sudden and inexplicable change in topic
- * the logical relations between sentences may be difficult to work out
- * the writer has made an inference may be made that the reader finds difficult to follow (Wikborg, 1990:133).

Wikborg's (1985:361) taxonomy of **cohesion-related** coherence breaks includes the following:

- * Uncertain inference ties.
- * Missing or misleading sentence connection.
- * Misleading distribution of given and new information within the sentence.
- * Too great a distance between the cohesive items in a cohesive chain.
- * The type of cohesive tie does not actually hold (e.g. an overtly signalled contrast or illustration is not borne out by the actual semantic relations established by the proposition(s).

The results of Wikborg's (1985:361) study reveals the following five most **frequent** types of coherence breaks, as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: The five most frequent types of coherence breaks in Wikborg's (1985;1990) study.		
	Percentage indicating frequency	Types of coherence break
1.	26%	Uncertain reference ties
2.	21%	Misleading paragraph division
3.	16%	Misleading sentence connection
4.	10%	Unjustified change of/drift of topic
5.	8%	Unspecified topic

It can be argued that essays which exhibit a prevalence of these coherence breaks would point to a lack of discourse competence on the part of the writer.

2.9.1. The effect of coherence breaks on the reader

As indicated in 2.9. both *text-based* coherence and *reader-based* coherence must be considered in any taxonomy which seeks to establish the effect text has on the reader (Couture, 1985:68), which is a concern of this study (cf.3.2.2.).

First, we need to consider, briefly, the role of the reader. As the reader processes the text he/she brings to it his/her schema or background frames of reference (cf. 2.1.2., 2.9.2.). These schema serve to create expectations in the mind of the reader when the text is read: expectations which are either modified or fulfilled in the process of continuous interaction with the text. In this interaction the reader relies upon various cues provided by the writer to make inferences and satisfy expectations raised in the text in the creation of coherence and meaning: such cues are both linguistic and rhetorical in nature. Phelps (1985) comments that such an understanding of coherence

suggests that readers will vary greatly in what they deem satisfying integrations, according to their expectations, goals, skills, and the individual text and context. In this sense coherence can never be an abstract structural property of a text, but is an individual judgement characterising very personal relationships between a text and its readers (Phelps, 1985:21).

Coherence breaks can result when reader expectations are not met. For example, when the topic is badly organised, or the reader is not oriented to the discourse theme in the introduction we say that there is a break in coherence. In other words, there is a break in *topic control*, due to a topic-related coherence break. For example, the writer may not have managed to signpost the text effectively by using the cohesive system efficiently. This may be due to the incorrect use of

a conjunction or incorrect pronominal reference. In this case the coherence break is cohesion-related.

2.9.2. Topic-related coherence breaks

Specifying the topic is part of the *framing* move in an essay introduction; this involves orienting the reader in the introduction to the thesis and intended structural development of the topic. This allows a relevant frame of reference or schemata to be activated in the mind of the reader (Langhan, 1993:9) enabling the reader to build up a plausible text-world (Enkvist, 1990) which facilitates understanding of the text. So a writer who frames an essay well in the introduction enables the reader to predict the development of the essay by the writer (Tedick & Mathison, 1995:213). If a reader can understand the text s/he regards the text as being coherent (cf.2.2., 2.9.1.).

Tedick and Mathison (1995:206, 214-218) consider framing an important variable in holistic analysis of coherence and note that writers who frame their essays well tend to receive higher holistic coherence scores.

Breaks in coherence attributed to problems in topic control include the following:

- * The writer has no discernable essay plan or outline (Carrell, 1982:486; 1987:53-55).
- * The writer has not considered relationships between his/her ideas with the resulting loss of topic control (Bamberg, 1983:422) evident in *unspecified change of/drift of topic*.
- * Loss of topic control is evident in the organisation of propositional content (Lautamatti, 1990:30, 36-38; Ball, 1992:503-506), resulting in the *irrelevance of content* used.

- * Evidence of problems handling the topic could be the result of the writer's lack of proficiency in ordering essay content according to the given-new principle (Cooper, 1988:353-358), i.e. *misleading ordering of material*.
- * When the writer cannot handle rhetorical shifts (Selinker, Trimble, & Trimble, 1978:314), this could lead to a loss of coherence of the essay argument.
- * Reader orientation through a frame of reference shared by both reader and writer (Scarcella, 1984:678,689) is essential if the reader is to understand the topic argument. If the reader is not initiated into the theme of the essay by the writer it may be difficult to establish coherence (Bamberg, 1984; Wikborg, 1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990:360), i.e. *unspecified topic*.

2.9.3. Cohesion-related coherence breaks

Enkvist (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990:12,18) refers to the taxonomy of Halliday and Hasan (1976) who suggest that overt linguistic markers, cohesive devices, contribute significantly to the coherence of a text. For example, *inferencing* (Enkvist, 1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990:17) is concerned with the recovering of referents indicated by cohesive devices in the discourse and this act contributes significantly to impressions of the coherence of the text by the reader. Uncertain inference ties can cause confusion in the mind of the reader as s/he seeks to link one part of the text to another as signified by the cohesive markers. Wikborg (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990:134-135) found that problems with inference ties constituted 27% of all the coherence breaks noted in her study of student essays.

Cohesion-related coherence breaks could include the following:

- * If the writer does not know how to use cohesive devices correctly the reader may puzzle over the relationships in the text the writer seems to be indicating (Poersch & Schneider, 1991:53,58; Eiler, 1983:175-176,181), i.e. *uncertain inference ties*.

- * Sometimes the use of a cohesive marker, for example a pronoun, or a demonstrative is inappropriate (Fries, 1986:16,18-19) and this can lead to a break in coherence, for example, *misleading or missing sentence connections* or *malfunctioning cohesive ties*.
- * An inability to use cohesion appropriately to link one part of the text to another related part can result in a lack of unity or interconnectedness (Neuner, 1987:101), i.e. *malfunctioning cohesive ties*.
- * Specific relationships in the text, for example, a contrast, are not indicated appropriately in the text by using the correct conjunction (Mackay and Mountford, 1978:137,146), i.e. *incorrect use of conjunctions*.
- * The temporal order of events needs to be sequenced in a coherent organisation, (McCagg, 1990:22); cohesive devices like enumerators can indicate this order explicitly - if this is not indicated there is a break in coherence.

2.9.4. Subjective nature of coherence breaks

Not all writers in this field are satisfied with the taxonomy of coherence breaks drawn up by Wikborg (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990) which has served as input for the descriptive analysis of coherence breaks in this study. For example, Connor and Johns (1990) do not agree with Wikborg's category of *misleading paragraph division* and state that Wikborg uses her own intuitions to make decisions about whether or not paragraphs are acceptable in terms of her understanding of what constitutes a coherent text (Connor & Johns, 1990:148-149). But as Enkvist (1987, in Connor & Kaplan, 1987:36-37) argues, scholarly journals allow long paragraphs, i.e. conceptual paragraphs. He distinguishes between typographical paragraphs which are typical of newspaper articles and text units in which the form, meaning and function of the text unit converge (Enkvist, 1987:37). This would imply that what is considered acceptable paragraph length is in itself a subjective judgement.

Another element of subjectivity in the assessing of coherence of a text lies with the *different attitudes of writer and reader*. Meyer and Rice (1982:157-158) found that different emphasis patterns used by the writer, which reveal his/her attitude to the *topic*, in the production of his/her text result in different organisation patterns in the text. An experienced reader who has to assess ESL student texts will approach the text with an organisational plan of how the text should be structured: readers have their own frame of reference as to how a text should be structured in response to a set topic. This, in turn, generates a set of expectations in their minds (Meyer & Rice, 1982:165,181). In the act of reading, the reader constructs a cognitive representation of the text. If this is similar to that intended by the writer understanding is achieved and the text gives an impression of coherence (Meyer & Rice, 1982:156).

Meyer and Rice (1982) suggest that *coherence breaks* can occur in the mind of the reader when the writer of the text does not organise his/her text effectively, if the register is inappropriate or the writer does not 'stick to the point'. Meyer and Rice comment on this saying:

Readers employing the structure strategy are hypothesized to approach a text looking for patterns which will tie all the propositions together and the author's primary thesis which will provide the content to be bound by these schemata (Meyer & Rice, 1982:162).

The determining of what constitutes a *coherence break* is viewed, therefore, as being subjective in nature and this could be considered a limitation to a study on coherence such as this one and Wikborg's (1990) (cf. 5.8). But as Johns (1990:247) implies, the notions of what constitutes coherent text is itself subjective.

2.10. The relationship between writing maturity and coherent text

Scinto (1983) draws attention to the suggestion that the ability to structure coherent text is an indication of cognitive development. Scinto's study focuses on the dynamics of text production, stating that the aim of text production is to produce coherent text. Units composing text relate to one another in a functional manner, i.e. displaying a logical structure, giving rise to what he terms *functional coherence*. He postulates that narrative and expository text produced by children aged between 8 and 15 will exhibit qualitative and quantitative differences which may be attributable to variations in age or reading ability. Scinto found that children in the concrete operational stage (aged 8-11) produced texts that were less compact and exhibited less cohesiveness than texts produced by low formal operational subjects (children aged 12-14). This finding supported his hypothesis that the ability to produce coherent text changes over time. In older students there was a more acute awareness of the text consumer in the production of expository text, suggesting that there is increased control over expository text production as students move into the formal operational stage of cognitive development: students demonstrate an increasing ability to produce more cohesive and compact text (Scinto 1983:241-242,247,249-250,253-254).

This lends support to the theory of language acquisition proposed by Cummins (1981, in Young 1995:67). Cummins (1981;1989) explains that there are two different types of language competence: conversational proficiency or BICS, and cognitive academic language proficiency or CALP. BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) is concerned with the skills needed to communicate effectively in terms of control over the phonology and a knowledge of the grammar and semantics of the target language (Young 1995:67, in Heugh, 1995). Whereas BICS develops in a relatively short space of time and within the support of a spoken context, which allows both verbal and non-verbal feedback, CALP takes longer. Cognitively demanding language is characteristic of context-reduced language which implies that "shared reality cannot be assumed and thus

linguistic messages must be elaborated precisely and explicitly" (Freeman and Freeman, 1992:23). Lieber (1981:13) comments that

this detachment from any actual context or audience is not only the chief distinction of written discourse, but also a major difficulty in composition ...

According to a study conducted by Freeman and Freeman (1992) it can take the ESL student about five to seven years to reach the expected level of the grade (in terms of age) that s/he should be in when compared to first language speakers (Freeman & Freeman, 1992:23). These cognitive academic language skills can be developed in a cognitive academic language learning approach where cognitive strategies such as grouping and inferencing encourage students to manipulate essay content material in various ways (Freeman & Freeman, 1992:229).

It is not known if the results of Freeman and Freeman's study can be applied to the ESL student in South Africa, and specifically to the ones whose essays supply the data for this study. The issue in South Africa is complicated by the fact that the imposition of English as a lingua franca, especially in the learning situation, whether at school or university, has tended to lead to a loss of "status, identity and role" (Young, 1995:64) for the indigenous languages. The consequent result is that these speakers may feel disempowered and may not attain the level of competence needed in their first language (L1) or mother tongue, before they attempt to learn the second language. According to Appel and Muysken (1990, in Young, 1995:66)

... children can reach high levels of competence in their second language if their first language development, especially usage of certain functions relevant to schooling and the development of vocabulary and concepts is strongly promoted by their environment. The high level of proficiency in the first language makes possible a similar level in the second language.

This implies that if a competent level of CALP is not attained in the mother tongue, the student entering the university may struggle to reach a satisfactory level of CALP in the language of study which differs from his/her own. It is not *age*, therefore, which is the significant criterion here, but *competence* in the L1, as well as *exposure* to the L2.

2.11. The influence of culture

Johns (1990) considers coherence as a *cultural phenomenon* which poses problems for the ESL student, i.e. the knowledge and skills one must have in order to function as an effective member of the academic community of a university.

Johns (1986:251) implies that familiarity with the conventions of English academic writing should result "in coherent prose". ESL students need to become more aware of the academic conventions in a English-medium university which in turn will help them "produce text *considered* coherent by their professors" (Johns, 1990:222, emphasis mine). Johns' argument indicates that the notion of coherence has some *subjectivity* attached to it and that what teaching staff consider coherent text may well differ from what the ESL student writer considers coherent text.

As Johns (1990:211) points out

the notion of coherence is a complex phenomenon, involving a multitude of features within the text as well as requiring an integration of reader expectations and text realisation.

In support of the contention that a student's native background will influence his/her ability to write coherent text, in terms of English discourse norms, Swales (1990:189) points out that "discoursal expectations are socioculturally established ..." and that as ESL writers will experience difficulties mastering the demands of register and grammar it becomes crucial for them "to signpost

unerringly" (Swales, 1990:204) to succeed at creating global coherence. This implies that the ESL writer must employ the cohesive system of English to strategically mark the development of the text.

2.12. Summary

Coherence has long been identified as a crucial aspect of writing quality (McCulley, 1983:1). As *coherence* is basically an intuitive judgement about a text researchers have sought to isolate aspects of text which are considered to contribute to coherence. McKenna (1987), for example, contends that the more we know about the nature of coherence the more accessible coherence will be to the educator, and hence to the student.

The essays which are the focus of this particular study are expository-type essays. Stotsky (1983) notes that such

Academic discourse seems to be characterised by a large, diverse, and highly literate vocabulary and by a richness of cohesive ties established through its vocabulary (Stotsky, 1983:440).

The management of coherence is dependent on the student writer's cognitive academic language proficiency, which incorporates aspects of discourse competence such as cohesion and topic control. As this review has indicated, coherence is not determined by one textual factor such as cohesion, but "... by a constellation of variables working together" (McKenna, 1987:13). For example, the structuring of a topic in an essay is concerned with text-based coherence, referred to by Lautamatti as propositional coherence (Lautamatti, 1990:31). This implies that the text demonstrates a unity of ideas which is related to the organising principles governing the text structure: cohesion serves to organise the flow of the topic throughout the text. It is here that discourse errors may be made in the organising and control of the flow of the topic of the writing. This study considers that these variables are *topic-related* and *cohesion-related*.

ESL student writers, in particular, need to be made aware of how to write more coherent text by managing the topic and integrating related parts of the essay argument by the correct use of cohesion and so avoid the pitfalls in text production which can lead to breaks in the impression of coherence when the essay is being read. From this point of view coherence is regarded as the outcome of the reader's interaction with the text (cf. Phelps, 1985:21-25; 2.1.1.; 2.6.1.) Wikborg's taxonomy takes into account the role of the reader, who judges whether or not the text is coherent, i.e. reader-based coherence.

The following chapter presents the research methodology and the terms of the taxonomy of coherence breaks, the hypotheses related to coherence and coherence breaks, in particular, and the procedures and statistical tests involved.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER CONTENTS

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- 3.7. Testing the relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks and the HCR scores
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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1. Introduction

This chapter reports on the method of data collection and methods of data analysis. The previous chapter considered the input of cohesion and coherence studies and the writing of academic text. As indicated in the introductory chapter, the focus of this study is on the relationship between the *frequency* of coherence breaks and the holistic coherence of ESL essays. Of further interest is the relationship between holistic coherence and marks awarded to essays. Finally, the influence of the tutor in the writing process (cf.1.6.) in terms of greater impressions of the coherence of essays, and a decrease in the frequency of coherence breaks, in final versions of essays is considered.

The research method of this study is exploratory, drawing on data from a naturally occurring group of subjects.

Wikborg's (1985;1990) taxonomy of coherence breaks has been used to develop the *analytical framework* for the descriptive analysis of the essays. This descriptive analysis is necessary to determine the frequency and type of coherence break in the essays corpus. To exemplify the definitions of these coherence breaks, reference has been made to actual student essays used in this research. Please note that some of these essays are reproduced, (e.g.AD8, AF8; AD9, AF9; AD15, AF15; AD16, AF16; BF3), in full, in Appendix B, so that the reader can see the quoted sections in the context of the whole essay.

The following discussion presents the objectives of the research process, the subjects, the data, the materials and procedures in the methods of data analysis.

3.1.1. Coherence and coherence breaks

This section serves to briefly orient the reader to the main theme of this research study - coherence breaks in essays written by first year ESL students during their first semester at university.

To communicate effectively through the written word at university, students must be able to structure their essays in such a way that the reader is able to follow the development of the argument - this draws on competencies in the ability:

- (a) to structure a topic and,
- (b) to use the cohesive system of English in the services of such topic development.

An essay gives an impression of coherence when the reader can follow the logical development of the writer's argument. Coherence is both text-based as well as reader-based:

- * the writer's use of, for example, the cohesive system of English supports *text-based* coherence (cf. 2.2.; 2.6. to 2.6.5.),
- * text communicates its meaning to the reader via its components and the construction of coherence and meaning is interactional in nature, i.e. the reader interacts with the text (cf. Johns, 1986:248-251), i.e. *reader-based* coherence (cf. 2.2.; 2.7.1. to 2.7.4.)

To assist the sense of the coherence of a piece of writing, the text must also have an overall plan which orders the propositional content of the text (c.f. van Dijk, 1980). An essay which does not comply with the above requirements could be viewed by a reader as lacking in coherence.

3.2. The research design

The research design is exploratory-quantitative-statistical (cf. Paradigm 6, Grotjahn, 1987:59-60, in Nunan, 1992:6):

- * **Exploratory:** This study utilises a framework (cf. Wikborg, 1990), developed to classify coherence breaks in essays written in English by Swedish mother-tongue students, in the analysis of essays written by first-year ESL students at university in this country.
- * **Quantitative:** Essays have been submitted to a descriptive analysis to determine the type and frequency of coherence breaks. As the nature of the features is more related to meaning than to form, as would be the case with spelling errors, there is greater scope for interpretation.
- * **Statistical:** The results of the descriptive analysis of the essays, i.e. the frequency of coherence breaks according to specific categories, have been subjected to statistical analysis to test the various hypotheses posited below, e.g. to establish whether there is a relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks and holistic coherence.

3.2.1. The objectives of the research procedures

This research investigation attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What types of coherence breaks can be identified in essays written by ESL students during the first semester? (cf. Hypothesis 1 below)
2. What are the most common types of coherence breaks found? (cf. Hypothesis 1 below)
3. To what extent are holistic coherence ratings of the coherence of a text (the dependent variable) influenced by the frequency of the coherence breaks analysed for the text (the independent variable)? (cf. Hypothesis 1 below)

4. Is there a link between the impressions of coherence in an essay, in this case the independent variable, and the percentage mark awarded to it, i.e. the mark for academic achievement? (cf. Hypothesis 2 below)
5. Do final essays show an improvement in terms of the frequency of coherence breaks and holistic coherence when compared to first drafts? In other words, has tutor intervention led to a greater sense of the coherence of the essay? (cf. Hypotheses 3 and 4 below).

3.2.2. The research hypotheses

In order to answer questions 1, 2 and 3 above the following main hypothesis is posited:

- H.1.** There is a negative relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks in essays and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

In order to fully answer these questions this hypothesis is subdivided further, i.e. positing a **negative** directional relationship between the **frequency** of a specific category of coherence break and the holistic coherence ratings, referred to as HCR (holistic coherence ratings) as in the following example:

- H.1.3. There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, unspecified topic in the introduction, and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The following is a list of sub-hypotheses related to H.1. which were formulated in the same way:

- H.1.1. cohesion-related coherence breaks.
- H.1.2. topic-related coherence breaks
- H.1.3. unspecified topic in introduction
- H.1.4. no elaboration of a statement made

- H.1.5. no integration of quote
- H.1.6. topic drift
- H.1.7. irrelevant content
- H.1.8. misleading paragraph division
- H.1.9. misleading ordering of content
- H.1.10. no sense of closure in the conclusion

In order to answer question 4 above, the following is posited:

- H.2.** There is a positive relationship between the holistic coherence and marks awarded to the essays.

Question 5, above, is related to the following hypotheses:

- H.3.** Final drafts of essays will have lower frequencies of coherence breaks than first drafts.
- H.4.** Final drafts of essays will have higher holistic coherence ratings than first drafts.

3.2.3. The subjects

The essays which provide the data base for this study were written by two groups of ESL students, 39 in all, enrolled in a credit course at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) called Learning, Language and Logic, which is an academic literacy course based on insights from Applied Linguistics and Communication (cf.1.3.,1.4., 1.5.1.). Although not confined to first-years, students generally take this course in their first year at university to help them cope with the demands of reading and writing academic texts in English. Essay-writing is a main component of the course and it is here that students could be expected to display a lack of discourse competence: creating coherent text demands that students are able to structure an argument, use cohesive devices

to signal the logical development of that argument, and to employ the accepted objective academic style.

Each student speaks an African language as a mother-tongue, for example, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, and has limited experience in writing academic texts in English (cf. Appendix A for further details on their background writing experiences etc.).

These two groups are homogenous, naturally occurring groups as determined by the university timetable.

3.2.4. The data

The process approach (cf. 1.5., 1.5.1, 2.5.1.), guides the essay writing process in the course. Students write two essays, based on the theory of the course which also incorporates using prescribed readings as input, during the first semester. The first essay is written in draft form and submitted to the tutor for comment. Students are free to utilise these suggestions or not in their final draft.

The second essay is not submitted for tutor comment, rather students rely on self- and peer-editing.

A total of 100 expository-type essays were made available by the LLL students for this present study. For the *statistical analysis*, samples were drawn from these essays. From the essays written for the first essay topic of the semester both the first draft and final draft written by a specific student was considered. First drafts were indicated by the capital letter **D**, final drafts by the letter **F**. Essay topic 1 was referred to by the letter **A**, so **AD** was the first draft of the essay, written in response to the first topic of the semester. The student writer was allocated a number which was constant for both first and final draft of that essay, e.g. **AD3** and **AF3** were written by the same student. There were 34 first-draft essays and 34 final-draft essays available for purposes of comparison in these groups, i.e. 68 essays in all.

The second essay, written in response to the second topic, may well have been written in draft form and submitted for peer-editing, but only the final draft was handed in to the tutor. This sample was indicated by the letter **B**, to indicate that this was the second essay of the semester, and by **F** to indicate that the draft was not submitted for marking by the tutor. Scripts were also allocated numbers as for essays written in response to the first topic, but these indicated a *different* set of writers from those in AD and AF. There were **32** essays available for analysis in group **BF**.

However, *all* **100** available essays were analyzed in order to determine the types of coherence breaks evident in the essays and how these impacted on the construction of coherence by the reader. This *descriptive analysis* focused on the whole text, moving from paragraph to paragraph to determine how the student created textual unity (or otherwise). Coherence breaks were determined per essay and were noted, as in the following example, which is for the first draft for essay topic 1 written by student number three.

Draft essay AD3

Topic-related coherence breaks	Total
Unspecified topic in introduction	2
No elaboration of a statement made	1
No integration of quote	4
Irrelevant content	1
No sense of closure in conclusion	1
Total topic-related coherence breaks	9
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	
Unclear/incorrect use of conjunction	1
Total cohesion-related coherence breaks	1
Total coherence breaks	10

Spelling mistakes and handwriting were not considered in the descriptive analysis as it was felt that this did not detract from the coherence of the essay, i.e. the reader was still able to understand the writer's meaning, as the photocopy from BF1 will show. For example, the writing may be difficult to read in places, and the word *writing* is incorrectly spelt, but one is able to understand what the writer is conveying (cf. page 187, Appendix B).

processes which result in the construction of meaning and also formulating questions which will enrich the reader's understanding about what it is meant in the texts. Contextual appropriateness can also be used to overcome uncertainty that may be brought about by difference in frames of reference. (Kamoleku.E.T AL (1994:109-112)

Various barriers can of communication can affect the understanding of the meaning of text. As I mentioned in the introduction, these can affect negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text. Both the writer and the reader experience barriers to effective communication, some affect both writing and reading of the message, and some are specific to reading, some to writing.

The findings from the descriptive analysis of all the essays was then combined, i.e. the coherence breaks per essay for the first draft of essay topic 1, the final draft for essay topic 1, and the final draft for essay topic 2. These were shown as schedules and may be found in Appendix C for purposes of closer study by the reader.

As the essay topic should guide the writer in determining the content of the essay (cf. 2.3., 2.7.2.) the essay topics for the two essays written during the first semester are reproduced below to guide the reader in following the discussion on coherence breaks (cf. 3.4.2.):

TOPIC FOR ESSAY 1:

LLL teaches in small groups rather than using lectures. Present an argument in which you show whether or not this is an effective method of teaching and learning. Draw on your prescribed readings listed below.

Your essay should be 800-900 words (about 3 pages) in length.

TOPIC FOR ESSAY 2:

Write an essay in which you argue that reading academic texts can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and writer of the text. You must draw on the prescribed readings to support your argument.

Your essay must be 5 pages in length (1000 to 1200 words).

3.2.5. Drawing the samples

Not all the essays were assessed for their holistic coherence. From the essays in groups AD, AF and BF random stratified (according to marks allocated to the essays) *samples* were drawn and submitted to experienced raters to determine

input for the statistical analysis of the H.1. and H.2. and the following hypotheses:

H.3. Final drafts of essays will have lower densities of coherence breaks than first drafts.

H.4. Final drafts of essays will have higher holistic coherence ratings than first drafts.

In sample BF there were 20 essays in this sample. Added to the 36 for AD and AF this gave 56 essays which were used as input for the statistical analysis for the main hypothesis, H.1. (and its related hypotheses), and H.2:

H.1. There is a negative directional relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks in essays and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

H.2. There is a positive relationship between the holistic coherence and marks awarded to the essays.

The same procedure was used to match the sample of essays to the universe of available essays (cf. Appendix B for further details of the means of the universe and sample for each group).

There was a small group of students whose essays were included in all three samples, as indicated below (cf. Table 4 below). The results of the findings for this small group are discussed in 4.7. with particular reference to H.3 and H.4.

Table 4: Essays included in AD, AF and BF

Student	Student
AD/AF4	BF1
AD/AF6	BF12
AD/AF8	BF8
AD/AF9	BF16
AD/AF11	BF15
AD/AF15	BF3
AD/AF17	BF5
AD/AF18	BF14

(cf. Appendix B for a selection of essays which have been reproduced for illustrative purposes.)

3.3. The assessment of coherence in student scripts

The assessing of coherence is the first stage in testing the following hypotheses:

- H.1.** There is a negative relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks in essays and the holistic coherence ratings of the essays.
- H.2.** There is a positive relationship between the holistic coherence and marks awarded to the essays.
- H.4.** Final drafts of essays will have higher holistic coherence ratings than first drafts.

As indicated in 3.2.5., only the samples AD, AF and BF were subjected to a Holistic Coherence Rating by LLL tutors. The procedure was as follows:

- * raters were given a photocopy of the original essay with any pencilled comments made during the marking process erased or tippexed out
- * the rater read through the essay and allocated a grade based on the holistic coherence of the essay. Grades were chosen from a grid with a range of 1 to 4.

Each tutor received her/his own copy of the grid for the assessment of holistic coherence in student essays. Each grade on the grid included an explanation of how to determine the specific category of coherence according to the necessary criteria for that specific category, (cf. Bamberg 1984). This grid with explanations of the categories of coherence is included in Appendix B.

Two tutors each assessed the coherence of a script. If one tutor assessed the essay as coherent, i.e. 3 or 4, and another tutor assessed the same essay as incoherent, i.e. 1 or 2, this meant that the script had to be further assessed by a third tutor/rater, who is not a member of the LLL teaching staff. The three results were then averaged to arrive at a final holistic coherence rating (HCR) which provided the input for the statistical analysis of hypotheses 1, 2 and 4.

Although supplied with the grid and the essay topic, the tutors/raters were not informed as to the *type of coherence breaks* in the analytic framework used in the descriptive analysis of the essays. My concern here was with the impressions of coherence gained by the reader of an essay; I did not want to influence the tutor's reception of the essay other than to provide the essay topic.

3.3.1. The raters

Teaching staff from the department of Applied Language Studies were asked to rate the essays in the samples for holistic coherence. Eight members of staff, experienced tutors on the LLL course, were available to rate the essays in the samples. An external rater, not a member of this department, was called upon to act in cases where the same script had been rated as incoherent by one rater, and coherent by another, as indicated in 3.3. LLL raters are familiar with the prescribed readings and bring their own expectations with them to the process of assessing for coherence. This can be a limitation in this method of assessing holistic coherence as it indicates subjectivity on the part of the rater. This external rater was not familiar with the prescribed readings, so it was possible that she would not be influenced by these in terms of expectations of topic content, and therefore, give a less biased opinion of the coherence inherent in the essays (cf. Appendix B for allocation of raters to essays).

Raters were given a random sample of essays from the draft of essay 1, sample AD, and from the final of essay 1, sample AF, and a sample of the second essay, sample BF - in each case care was taken not to give the same rater the draft and final essay from the same student in samples AD and AF. For example, the tutor who read through AD1 would not read through AF1. It was hoped that this would lessen the opportunity for familiarity with the draft version, for example, to influence the assessment of the sense of holistic coherence in the final version.

3.4. Introducing a model for the taxonomy of coherence breaks to be used in the descriptive analysis of student essays

The selected taxonomy seeks to account for coherence breaks which arise in the mind of the reader when reading a text (Couture, 1985). So the analytic framework or model posited in this chapter seeks to meet the three criteria, which according to Couture (1985), (cf. 2.8. to 2.8.3) should account for the

effect written prose has on the reader. These criteria are referred to below and serve to elaborate on Wikborg's (1985; 1990) taxonomy in which she seeks to account for both text and reader related coherence breaks:

- * an analytic examination of text as directed, multifunctional social interaction
- * a demonstration of how texts achieve thematic or topic unity
- * an explanation of how formal items relate to reader response (Couture, 1985:68).

3.4.1. Operational definitions of topic-related coherence breaks used in the descriptive analysis

Wikborg's (1985;1990) taxonomy of coherence breaks, both topic-related and cohesion-related (cf.2.9.), is the foundation of the modified analytic framework used to identify *coherence breaks* in this study. We first consider topic-related coherence breaks. The importance of the reader's frame of reference (schemata) which includes expectations of (a) *how* the essay should be written and, (b) *what* content should be included from the prescribed readings, has been considered in determining the categories used in the analytic framework of this study.

The categories of topic-related coherence breaks and their operational definitions used in the descriptive analysis of the students' essays to determine the type of coherence breaks which typically occurred in essay writing during the first semester at university are presented below:

Table 5: List of operational definitions of topic-related coherence breaks

Category of Topic-related coherence breaks	Operational definition
Unspecified topic in introduction	Writer fails to orient the reader to the essay discourse theme and does not facilitate expectations as to what to expect in the essay.
No elaboration of a statement made	Writer includes a piece of information in support of the essay argument but does not indicate this relationship so that the function of the information in that specific context is unknown.
No integration of quote	Writer's quotes from prescribed readings are not integrated into the topic development.
Topic drift	Writer does not develop an aspect of the topic in a paragraph but changes to another aspect without signalling specifically this change in direction.
Irrelevant content	Writer includes irrelevant content.
Misleading paragraph division	Writer divides a paragraph where logically no transition should take place.
Misleading ordering of content	Writer presents material in an order which does not serve the development of the topic.
No sense of closure in conclusion	Writer does not meet the expectations raised in the introduction.

3.4.2. Topic-related coherence breaks

Essays are written in response to an essay topic. The ideas of the writer about the topic are organised by the writer and presented in the essay in such a way that the reader can follow the writer's argument. Van Dijk (1980) notes that for

a text to be coherent it must have an overall structure which orders the ideas or propositions (in McKenna, 1987:69). In the LLL course students are introduced to the function of various parts of the essay argument, e.g. introduction, and how these work to forward the writer's response to the essay topic which has been set (cf.1.5., 1.6.).

Couture (1985:68) views text as a piece of purposive, multifunctional social interaction (cf. Inglis & Kuanda, 1996), and comments that any analytical framework must indicate how an essay achieves topic unity and explain how formal items, used in this framework, relate to reader response (cf. 2.2., 2.3., 2.7.3. and 3.4.). The control of the topic is thus very important to the coherence of the essay.

Below is Wikborg's (1990) taxonomy of *topic-related* coherence breaks (cf.2.9.):

- * unspecified topic
- * unspecified change/drift of topic
- * misleading paragraph division
- * misleading ordering of material
- * irrelevance of material/content.

We now consider each of Wikborg's topic-related coherence breaks and I will try to explain, in the accompanying discussion, some of the problems I experienced in explicating the various coherence breaks (cf.3.6. for a further explanation of the problems experienced, firstly, deciding on whether a part of the text constituted a coherence break or not; and secondly, in deciding on the specific category of coherence break).

Firstly, we will consider Wikborg's category of ***unspecified topic***. For a reader to have some expectation of the content of an essay the writer needs to:

- * orient the reader in introduction: directly, or, by supplying a context or situation.
- * clearly identify the topic.

Therefore, the potential exists for a ***coherence break*** to occur when the writer does not orient the reader, either directly or by providing cues to the context, or when the topic is not identified in the introduction.

Wikborg's second category of ***unspecified change/drift of topic*** is supported by Bamberg who says that discourse is coherent when there is no shift/drift of topic. According to Bamberg there may be minor digressions but the writer has one main topic throughout and changes in topic are signalled (cf. Bamberg, 1984:307). But when the writer shifts topic or digresses from the topic this affects the coherence of the essay (cf. Bamberg, 1984:306-307).

The category of ***misleading paragraph division*** is supported by Bamberg (1984:307) who says that an essay is coherent when the writer organises topic development according to a discernible plan which is sustained throughout the essay with the topic being developed via paragraphs. When the writer has no discernible organisational plan and frequently relies on the listing of content material, and when sentences/paragraphs are not linked together, an essay becomes incoherent.

The ***misleading ordering of content*** can occur when the writer has no organisational plan. The writer may then list information or follow an associative order not necessarily followed by the reader, leading to a loss of coherence. The misleading distribution of given-new information within sentences is characteristic of essays which receive low holistic coherence ratings (Bamberg, 1984:318).

The writer is expected to sustain the development of the topic by using material which is relevant. The *irrelevance of content* can pose a major problem to the reader, especially one familiar with the prescribed readings, as certain features of the topic are expected to be included in the essay (cf. Bamberg 317-318). For example, when the writer concludes with a definite sense of closure the essay is rated as coherent, however when there is a *lack of final closure* in the conclusion the essay is rated as incoherent, (Bamberg, 1984:318), and this is another category of coherence break to consider when analyzing student essays.

However, as indicated earlier, I have experienced some difficulty in clearly explicating these topic-related coherence breaks. For example, Wikborg's (1985) category of unspecified topic could occur in the *introduction* (cf. Bamberg, 1984) or at the *paragraph level* (cf. McKenna, 1987). In both cases this could lead to a loss of topic control which could be attributed to various factors. For example, if a writer includes a statement from his/her internalised knowledge of the reading material but does not elaborate on that, for example, by exemplification or further clarification, the result could be that the reader has trouble relating this information to the topic developed thus far. Such a coherence break is termed a lack of elaboration and may be further explained by reference to the role of topic organisation.

In organising an essay topic the writer has to decide which ideas to emphasize, which implies that a text follows a hierarchy of content: some statements are superordinate or subordinate to others. Statements which are deemed superordinate serve to control the main theme of the discourse. Statements which are subordinate serve to *elaborate* on what has gone before, i.e. they support the main theme. Writers decide which statements are more important than others and "... explicitly or implicitly suggest the type of top-level structure or schematic structure" (Meyer & Rice, 1982:156) which cue readers to the writer's argument. In the process of reading (cf. 2.5.1.), the reader attempts to construct a cognitive representation of the discourse which corresponds to that

intended by the writer (Meyer & Rice, 1982:156), i.e. to uncover's the writer's frames of reference so that understanding of the text can be reached.

This indicates that the development of a topic is served by the way it is structured. Jacobs (1982, in Inglis & Kuanda, 1996:7) says that a student writer's ability to produce a coherent text is greatly dependent on his/her ability to organise the material selected as *relevant* to the essay topic, and failure to include relevant information can be a coherence break, as noted by Wikborg (1985; 1990).

On the other hand, if the writer uses a direct quote from the source material but does not weave this into the essay topic development the reader may wonder why the quote is there at all. Such a coherence break, therefore, is the lack of integration of source material into the essay argument. Essays which are a string of quotes, for example, show no topic development at all.

It must be noted that the categories in the analytic framework of coherence breaks tend to overlap: for example, the topic may be under-developed because the student has not *elaborated* on the statements made in the essay or failed to *integrate* a quote into the topic development. Notwithstanding these overlaps, this researcher has sought to describe and exemplify each category as clearly and precisely as possible.

The following sections attempt to explicate the posited categories of coherence breaks. This explanation offered for the types of coherence breaks will be illustrated by extracts from the essays written by the students included in the corpus of data. Quotes from the student essays are lengthy because, as McKenna (1987:69) notes, "Coherence is a phenomenon that is concerned with the whole text rather than a single paragraph".

With reference to the quotes from student essays: please note that comments about the type of coherence break are given in square brackets, after the

occurrence of the coherence break, and are written in bold italics. Examples of coherence breaks will be contrasted, as far as possible, with quotes from essays where the writer has been successful in a specific area, e.g. specifying the essay topic. Further comments/observations will be given in brackets, in bold italics. This convention will apply to all quotes from essays in this dissertation. No spelling or grammatical corrections have been made to these quotes.

3.4.3. Unspecified topic in introductions

The introduction is the first move the writer makes in organising the structure of the essay argument, i.e. the framing move according to Tedick and Mathison (1995). Wikborg (1990) noted that 8% of the coherence breaks in the scripts she analyzed were due to unspecified topic.

Other reports in the literature refer to the importance of the introduction. McMurrey and Campman (1983:192-193) point out that academic assignments, e.g. essays, are structured via the use of "special function" paragraphs such as the introduction, the essay argument and the conclusion. The introduction usually has three elements which serve specific purposes: a lead-in, a thesis and a map, which shall be referred to as a statement in the introduction which gives the reader some idea of what is to come in the essay argument, i.e. the discourse theme. There are various ways to lead into an essay and some of the following particularly apply to expository text: using a quotation, writing a definition, making a general statement in relation to the topic, and specifying a problem which will be discussed in the body of the essay (McMurrey & Campman, 1983: 194-195). However, for first-year ESL students writing their first expository-type essay the most common *lead-in* may be a brief definition of the main element of the topic, for example the following could be a possible introduction to essay topic one:

A small group is a number of peers who meet regularly to discuss a specific learning task.

The *thesis* is the main idea of the essay and is shown in bold italics below in a possible introduction, as suggested by myself:

A small group is a number of peers who meet regularly to discuss a specific learning task. *However, as Gulley and Leathers (1977) point out, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using this type of teaching/learning methodology at university.*

The *map*, or *statement of direction* for the body of the essay argument, serves to orient the reader to the strategy used to structure the argument in support of the thesis (McMurrey & Campman, 1983: 194-195). For example, the following is a suggested introduction which includes a map statement:

A small group is a number of peers who meet regularly to discuss a specific learning task. However, as Gulley and Leathers (1977) point out, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using this type of teaching/learning methodology at university. *In this essay, I shall discuss how students can be empowered to become effective learners by participating in a small group, as well as the problems which may arise and cause the group to become an inefficient learning situation.*

However, a map statement is **not** an essential component of an introduction although its inclusion does serve a valuable purpose in orienting the reader. When the reader is not oriented to the discourse topic this may affect the way the essay is received by the reader, as Leki (1995) points out. In this descriptive analysis I expected the writer to refer to the essay topic, i.e. provide a thesis, as well as indicate the direction the essay was going to take, i.e. the map statement. If the writer failed to provide a thesis, i.e. topic was not specified, this constituted a coherence break. If the map statement was not supplied this constituted another coherence break.

Reference will now be made to student essays to illustrate this coherence break. Although the introduction for BF20 does refer to "the reader", necessary for this essay topic, it does not explicitly specify the topic which is "the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of a text":

Quote BF20

Communication process occurs in different ways but it is also important to spell out that it also comes through interaction of speaking and reading. Furthermore, there are fundamental differences between the listener and the reader. The speaker may through interaction influence the listener or vice versa while the reader may not, as the text from the writer has a permanence in its message and the text may be referred to more than once. Interaction with the text is more broader than in a spoken interaction situation. *[The introduction does refer loosely to the topic but does not direct the reader to how the essay will deal with the topic, i.e. signposting the discourse theme - this would constitute one coherence break.]*

The introduction for BF6 sets the scene for the topic but does not orient the reader as to how the student writer is going to respond to the topic in his essay, i.e. there is no map statement. This may be refuted by other LLL tutors on reading this essay and again highlights the contention that the reader brings certain specific ideas to the text which includes how it should be structured (cf.2.12.), and in the mind of this reader this would constitute one coherence break.

Quote BF6

Communication can take various forms namely talking, reading, and writing, communication is an act of negotiation of meaning whereby the communicators communicating in any form have a purpose or

intention to convey a certain message or work out a particular issue. Therefore it follows that reading academic texts can be seen as negotiation of meaning between the writer and the reader who are communicators in the case. However the negotiation of meaning is only feasible or properly achieved if the barriers to communication are overcome or delimited, when the frames of reference between the reader and the writer correspond or match and when the uncertainty such as ambiguity can be reduced to a certain extent.(BF6)

Compare the above introductions with that of BF33, which deals with essentially the same aspects of the topic but BF33 clearly specifies the essay topic.

Quote BF33

When we communicate we negotiate meaning. negotiation of meaning is the sharing of information from multiple sources by two or more people. We can negotiate meaning through reading, writing, talking and through symbols. This essay will focus on the negotiation of meaning with the reading of academic texts. "Reading is not the transference of knowledge from one container, that is the writer, to the other, the reader" (John, 1994:109).*(The essay topic is specified.)* This essay will also show ... some difficulties facing the reader of the academic texts. *(Here we have a map statement)* (BF33)

Therefore, a lack of lead-in, thesis and map statement all impact on specifying the essay topic, a failure to meet any one of these three criteria constitutes a coherence break.

3.4.4. No elaboration of a statement made

According to Widdowson (1978) (in Wikborg, 1990:134) a text is rated as coherent when the reader is able to understand the function of each succeeding unit of text in the development of overall meaning . Wikborg states that it is the writer's responsibility to ensure that the reader can quickly distinguish between the specification of a point just asserted by the writer and a new point, or, to put this another way, "... between the elaboration of a point just made and the presentation of a contrasting one" (Wikborg, 1990:133-134), (cf. Lieber's functional roles in Lieber, 1981:310-312). One of the sources of the breakdown of coherence in student texts is precisely this failure to make clear such functions of succeeding points in an essay.

Wikborg (1990:147) refers to van Dijk (1977), who contends that a single sentence, standing alone, does not "acquire independent topical character" as it is undeveloped and unsupported. *Elaborations* thus can be said to serve in facilitating the impression of coherence of an essay. McKenna (1987:73) states that

... the more organised is the text structure, the more accessible is coherence. The more the reader has to infer from the text, the possibilities of misconstruing the author's message become greater.

So a statement could serve as a *clarification* of what has gone before, or as an *exemplification*, or it could be a *generalisation*. Statements which are generalisations need development if they are to function coherently in the structuring of a topic and lessen the potential for misconstruing the writer's argument.

One of the most frequent problems noted by this researcher in the writing of LLL students during the first semester of study is a lack of *elaboration*: a statement is made which is not linked to the topic theme of that paragraph or section of text. Sometimes a statement is a 'tag-on' at the end of a sentence and the reader

cannot work out its function in the text. Essay AD5, reflects, among other factors, a lack of elaboration. The following is a quote from the draft.

Quote AD5

Furthermore a small group situation is a good place rather than using lecture. Lecture work is to come in the class and teach that subject he/she did not have time to discuss the things that you do not understand, Whereas in small group you have an opportunity to discuss with other members. In lecture room there are many student you cannot work together other student do no pay attention at the end you did not gain even one information. This method is not good. *[What method is being referred to here? The writer seems to assume that the reader is familiar with the context of the small group but this reference to "method" needs some form of elaboration in terms of topic development - this would constitute one coherence break, that of 'no elaboration']*

Small group discussion situation give as an potential to develop our mind. You can develop by discussing and thinking the things which is relevant in that task, It help you see where is weak or good. You must try by all means that you participate and active in order you group to be successful *[The word "successful" needs some explaining, this would constitute one coherence break, 'no elaboration']*

An extract from the final version of the above essay, AF5 illustrates this particular type of coherence break further, of which there are three examples in all.

Quote AF5

According to John (1994) there are advantages and disadvantages that can be made group successful are social values of learning through discussion. In small group every members must work hand in hand.

[Apart from the missing word "methodology" this notion of working "hand in hand" needs to be made explicit - coherence break here is one of no elaboration]. As you are a member of that group have an opportunity to raise up your own point of view and your argument. All members try to participate not even a single one can depend to either (another) person ***[this idea of dependence and participation needs elaboration in terms of topic development - coherence break here is that of no elaboration].*** It (is) a good method of learning to support your group at the end to be successfully ***[As it is not clear here what the student means and some elaboration on this statement is necessary in order to develop the topic - coherence break here is that of no elaboration].***

3.4.5. No integration of quote

Closely related to a lack of *elaboration* of a statement made is the lack of *integration* of quotes from prescribed material - the function of such quotes is topic support.

Givon (1986, in McCagg, 1990:23) notes that a writer needs to signal the relationship of one part of a text to another: this is termed the function of larger thematic organization which a writer must control if the text is to be coherent. Listing of information without relating this to the whole text can also lead to a break in coherence as there is no sense of textual unity.

In an essay a writer may draw upon insights gleaned from his/her reading and use these in support of the topic development. The key here is that these quotes/references must be integrated into the text; they cannot stand alone. An extract from AD9 illustrates that when a writer does not integrate a quote this impacts on coherence - further comments on the coherence breaks follow the quote:

Quote AD9

We can also be given another factor that tells us how to gain from group interaction. They stated clearly that "small group have employed discussion in wide-ranging activities and diverse situations because it has some obvious strengths" (Gulley, HE and Leathers DG (1977) page 56.)

[This quote needs to be integrated into the topic of the essay, i.e. its relationship to the topic needs to be clearly specified - this would constitute one coherence break, 'no integration'.] We can also find that in group interaction there are limitations but strong enough and consisted of committed.

The small group is also used to produce better result in most situation. The fact is that where equally able individuals working together the better result follows. The group consisted more sources of knowledge as we individuals can manage to cope with. That is caused by the person's background such as experience in particular issue such as exposed to knowledge (AD9, pp.1-2).

Apart from the initial difficulty in sourcing the referent of they in the first paragraph (c.f. Givon's function of referential tracing in McCagg, 1990:22), the student quotes Gulley and Leathers' point that small groups do have some strengths, is this the "gain" referred to in the first sentence? - the reader has to make the inference. Furthermore, the quote is left to stand on its own, the function of the quote in the paragraph is not integrated within the paragraph.

3.4.6. Topic drift

Problems arise in reading an essay when *topic shifts* are not signalled: the reader then has trouble relating one part of the text to another. Wikborg (1990:134) includes topic shift/drift as a single category of coherence break. However, a distinction can be made, in my opinion, between topic shift and topic drift. As

noted already, (cf. 2.1.2.) readers have certain expectations when reading a text that the topic will be maintained throughout the discourse (Swales, 1990:190). Should there be a change of topic this must be signalled to the reader, often by the use of an adversative, for example:

It rained all day, typical winter weather, which curtailed most outdoor activities at the school, including the rugby match. On the other hand, the student attendance at the annual debate was particularly high.

The reader is able to process these shifts in topic because they are signalled as exemplified above. However, specific signalling is not always necessary for the reader to follow the topic development. For example, when the writer does change the course in topic development these shifts can be indicated by a change in paragraph, the reader anticipates these shifts and there is no loss of focus.

However, when the writer drifts from one aspect of the topic to another, with no clear indication to the reader as to the function of this shift, the intention of the writer cannot be grasped, for example, when the writer digresses or shifts from the topic in a way that would be "... disconcerting ... to the reader" (McKenna, 1987:76). The category of coherence break in this case is that of *topic drift*.

Topic shift, then, for the purposes of this present study, indicates a deliberate change in direction in dealing with the topic by the writer. On the other hand, *topic drift* seems to be the evidence of a writer unsure of how to tackle the topic, as s/he wanders from one aspect to another and this would constitute a coherence break.

Topic drift, mainly at paragraph level, can be illustrated by the extract below from AD7.

Quote AD7

Small group is effective because the quality of the discussion and the learning depends on the cohesiveness of the group. I say that because people are enjoying to be together as a group. (*Topic 1 "group cohesiveness"*) Small group can create a large number of methods of solving certain problems because there are many approaches and methods of solving that particular problem because group members have different methods and different approaches of solving methods [*From "group cohesiveness to "problems" Topic 2 both of which need elaboration as aspects of the main topic - this would constitute the coherence break 'topic drift'*].

In an extract from the final version, AF7, the same writer is still experiencing problems in 'sticking' to the topic. The writer starts to work with a certain aspect of the topic and then drifts to discuss other aspects of the topic which are inappropriate in this context. The idea of discussion is developed by reference to member preparation but does not relate to the group cohesiveness; in effect, AF7 has drifted from one aspect of the topic to another and not really adequately developed any part of the topic in support of the opening sentence.

Quote AF7

According to Gulley and Leathers (1977) small groups is effective because the quality of the discussion and the learning depends on the cohesiveness of the group members. This happens [*Topic now changes from group "cohesiveness" to "socialising" to being "motivated" but no one aspect is developed fully - coherence break of topic drift*] because all the people are socialising together as a group (*This coherence break could be due to misunderstanding the section on social benefits to working in a small group in the prescribed reading*). In the discussion situation members can be motivated by the performance of others, according to Gulley and Leathers. This happens because if you come to

the group unprepared and others prepared, those who are prepared will be easily notice you that you are unprepared. So next period you attend you will be well prepared.

To summarise, questions such as the following arise in the mind of the reader:

- * What is the intention of this writer?
- * Where is the focus of his/her topic development?
- * How does this information relate to what has come, or to what is to come?

In such cases such unspecified topic drift can lead to a loss of focus (McKenna, 1987:76) with a resultant impact on coherence.

3.4.7. Irrelevance of content

The above section leads into this as topic drift could be the result of the use of irrelevant content, and this indicates the difficulty that this researcher has had in clearly separating these categories from each other.

McKenna (1987:48) defines text as a semantic unit which forms a unified whole. Drawing on the research of Kintsch & Vipond, (1979, in McKenna, 1987:39-40) on the properties of readability in a text, she contends that coherence is interactional in nature: the reader interacts with the text in the construction of coherence. McKenna sees coherence as creating "... the link between the reader, the writer and the mutually agreed upon world" (McKenna, 1987:75). This, according to McKenna, implies a contract between the reader and the writer in that the writer will focus on one topic and supply material relevant to that topic (McKenna, 1987:14). Witte and Faigley (1981) also refer to this as "... a tacit contract between the writer and the reader that the writer will provide only information *relevant to the current topic*" (Witte & Faigley, 1981:200, emphasis mine).

With regard to the use of irrelevant content in an essay the following two of Givon's functions are of particular relevance:

- * *Expectations and counter-expectations* in reference to propositional content.
- * *Larger thematic organization* where the writer signals the overall thematic organization of the discourse (McCagg, 1990:23).

The very topic itself sets up expectations and counter-expectations as to the content of the propositions expected to be found in the text (cf. 2.3, 2.4. and 2.7.2.). Pilus (1996) notes that a reader is cued by the essay topic as to what to expect to find in the essay argument and draws on his/her "pragmatic knowledge" to determine whether or not these expectations are realised in the essay text. Unity of ideas serves to develop a "sense of connectedness and appropriateness in terms of form and content" (Pilus, 1996:47,48), i.e. the *larger thematic organization*, and hence a sense of coherence.

Minor digressions in topic development can be tolerated and will not grossly impact on coherence as the writer develops one main topic providing these digressions do not interrupt the smooth processing of the discourse. However, when these shifts from topic become too frequent the essay tends to become incoherent because there is no sense of textual unity and the use of irrelevant content can lead to even greater incoherence.

The following quote from AD21 shows how the use of irrelevant content impacts on coherence.

Quote AD21

All the disadvantages have indicated that they usually occurs under some certain conditions, but as I can see that advantages only when the method is apply then they strike with goodness ***[not sure what is being referred to here - coherence break of 'irrelevant content']***.

As a conclusion conditions can be controlled the rightful course fulfilled they seem effective.

To emphasize the following point, the LLL tutor has knowledge of the prescribed readings and expects that students will support their essay argument by drawing material from these. When irrelevant content is included it can be difficult for the reader to establish an impression of coherence because of the difficulty in relating the content of the text to the topic question.

3.4.8. Misleading paragraph division

This category focuses on a stretch of text governed by a specific aspect of the main topic termed a paragraph: *paragraph division* can thus serve to indicate topic-shift (Wikborg, 1990:136-139). Wikborg (1990) found that misleading paragraph division was the second most frequent coherence break in her study and identified two types of misleading paragraph division:

- * Cases where long paragraphs contain topic changes which would be better served by a break in the paragraph.
- * Cases where there is a paragraph change without a corresponding change in topic.

However, it must be noted that paragraphing is linked to genre type: some genres favour longer paragraphs than others (cf. Wikborg, 1990).

A paragraph break can serve a rhetorical function, for example, to draw attention to a particular statement, rather than a topic-marking function. But if the paragraph break does not clearly demonstrate this function it misleads the reader into expecting a new topic or aspect of the topic when in fact none has taken place (Wikborg, 1990:135). Wikborg points out that in essays which have few alternate structuring devices, for example, cohesive signposting of text organisation by using topic-shift signals, for example, enumerators like first of

all and finally, paragraph divisions are major topic-shift markers (Wikborg, 1990:136). Students who lack proficiency in using continuatives/discontinuatives, which may be considered an aspect of academic proficiency (cf. Cummins, 1981), may rely on paragraph division to indicate topic change and if these are not used judiciously the reader may find following the argument in the text difficult.

As referred to above, paragraphing is closely linked to the writer's idea of how the text should be organised. Although experienced writers may "lunge into writing a paragraph without a clear sense of organisation" (McMurrey and Campman, 1983:120) this is more typical of the inexperienced writers such as the LLL student. Writers need to know which items of text are on the same level of abstraction, i.e. co-ordinate, and which are subordinate, i.e. at a lower level: in other words a text follows a hierarchy of content (Meyer & Rice, 1982:156). Brostoff (1981:284) contends that "... understanding abstraction levels seems necessary for coherent thinking and writing."

When an essay consists of long 'paragraphs' packed with contrasting topic ideas all jostling for position in the creation of global meaning, the reader is faced with the task of prioritising the information presented and linking this to the overall discourse theme. In texts like these the removal of obvious paragraph divisions has a severe impact on the creation of coherence (Wikborg, 1990:136). In the student essays in my study, paragraphs which exhibited extreme shifts of topic without overt signalling were analyzed under the category *topic drift*. However, sometimes a student writer may divide a paragraph at a point where logically no division should be. An extract from essay BF19 serves to illustrate this point.

Quote BF19

It is said that if the writer writes a book, he/she has a purpose for doing so. The reader than reads it, in that way there been communication between the reader and the writer.

If the writer writes a book, that is something that intentionally stands for speaking out what he/she wants to say so and that is called a symbol and in that way the writer of the text and the reader communicate.

The two paragraphs above would have functioned better as one unit of text. As it is, the reference to the 'symbol' in the last sentence is somewhat misleading although the student does imply in that latter part of the sentence that this is the way the writer and reader communicate. This reference to symbol in itself needs further elaboration to explicate the function of this phrase in relation to the larger section of text.

However, it must be stressed that notions on coherence breaks are subjective. For example, Connor and Johns (1990) indicate that Wikborg's (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990) decisions on what are acceptable and unacceptable paragraphs, are based on "her own, intuitions" (Connor & Johns, 1990:148) (cf. Phelps, 1985).

For the purposes of this framework, when the student breaks a paragraph where logically no transition should take place and thus raises the expectation in the reader's mind that some other aspect of the topic is now to be discussed, which in fact is not done, there is the potential for a break in coherence.

3.4.9. Misleading ordering of content

The coherence break, *misleading ordering of content*, forms part of Wikborg's (1985;1990) taxonomy of coherence breaks but it has been difficult, when working through the essays, to determine precisely as whether or not a piece of material should have preceded, or followed, the presentation of another; except in cases where the understanding of one section is dependent on the presentation of another, and this has been the criterion which has guided me in the determination of this coherence break in an essay.

The subjectivity of this particular coherence break can be understood more clearly in the light of the following discussion. Ideas on what material should be included first or emphasized are specific to the individual. I can appreciate that in the genre of writing laboratory reports the ordering of the content would impact on the outcome of any procedures listed, perhaps with disastrous results. Wikborg's (1985:133) study drew from various disciplines, viz. business administration, law, journalism, comparative literature and English. According to Johns (1990) and Leki (1995) each discipline has its own notions of how an essay should be structured. The essays for this study are expository-type essays for a course based on communication theory and academic literacy, for example. Students have to use prescribed readings as input for their essays and the choice of what content to use and how to sequence this content is largely left up to them, provided it meets the demands of the topic, which in turn implies some sort of hierarchy in the arranging of material. For example, the first essay topic raises the expectation that small groups in a university context will first be defined before the writer explains their advantages or disadvantages in terms of the topic.

If the category of *misleading ordering of content* is linked to the notion that the topic creates a set of expectations in the mind of the reader as to what material should be in the essay as well as to how this information should be organised in relation to parts of the topic or sub-topics (Witte, 1983:317; McCagg, 1990:23) it is easier to define. But the overall subjectivity of this coherence break is difficult to ignore when dealing with essays and the ordering of their content. My expectations, as a reader, might not match the way the writer has organised the material but this does not necessarily mean that there is a resulting incoherence inherent in the text. As far as possible, this coherence break will be illustrated further in the following quote from AF3.

Quote AF3

Small group discussions could be an effective method of learning in the 3L. And in the university Education. Small group discussion can help to improve the language competence in order to achieve the university demands and aims. On the other hand small group discussions could be a waste of time. It may hinder the success of the group like discussion goes off topic and people get on one item.

Firstly, small group discussion have more resources of the information. As participants interacting in each other in English. Therefore the language competence can be improved. The interaction of a group can empower the learner in the language competence as a second language in the university education. Small group discussion can achieve more and become more advanced through the mutual relationship among its members and unity.

Furthermore, small group discussion can develop the active critical thinkers people who are open to different opinions, critically analyses. People who are able to develop their own informations. Not rather consulting books too much. That can help the small group discussion to work through to improve the thinking of other members, censoring out poor ideas and discovering fallacious reasoning and in other ways taking the advantage of their combined intelligence, experience and information (Gulley & Leathers, 1977:59). *[This last paragraph would have been better, i.e. 'flowed better', if information relating to empowering the learner had been organised and presented in a more systematic fashion - student combines education, second language competence and becoming a critical thinker - an example of 'misleading ordering of information']*.

An extract from AF8 may serve to further illustrate this category.

Quote AF8

A small group is a number of people who are combined together with the purpose of doing the tasks. According to John (1994:117) groups have some form of common characteristic that enables them to be considered as belonging together in some way. The small group may produce the higher quality decisions than individuals working separately (John, 1994:118). *[In this example the student moves from the combination of the group to belonging together because of some specific characteristic to producing higher quality decisions - there is 'misleading ordering of content', this leads, in turn, to topic drift, which again impacts negatively on the coherence of this paragraph].*

However, to define this category more succinctly, one could suggest that when a writer presents material in an order which does not seem to efficiently serve the development of the topic, a reader may determine that this is a coherence break. But again, this points to the subjectivity inherent in determining coherence breaks. As Phelps (1985:21) has pointed out, different readers approach a text with different expectations, and that includes expectations as to the ordering of the topic, e.g. what aspects of the topic should be emphasized, what aspects should be subordinate to other aspects.

3.4.10. No sense of closure in conclusion

This category is also not included in Wikborg's (1985;1990) taxonomy. However, when reading through the literature it became obvious that a satisfactory conclusion is an integral part of topic development and I decided to consider a lack of closure at the end of an essay as a category of coherence break. According to Bamberg (1994) a fully coherent essay will conclude with a statement that gives the reader a definite sense of closure. Generally conclusions

refer back to the main idea expressed in the introduction and should not contain new content, as this will raise new expectations in the reader's mind.

Conclusions are frequently signalled, e.g. "Thus ...", "Therefore, to conclude ...".

The extract from AD4 provides a definite sense of closure.

AD4

In conclusion, limitations and exceptions to this method of teaching and learning may affect its effectiveness but the values and advantages (of this) method outweigh the limitations. This, therefore, makes this method more effective than the lecture method. It is not only an effective method but also seems the most appropriate method for achieving one of the fundamental goals of learning which include(s) (the) growth of minds which seek actively and critically for the truth and engagement) with others in debate about that truth (John, 1994:9).

Some essays did not seem to have a conclusion at all. The last paragraph from AD1, presumably the conclusion, does not provide any sense of closure.

Quote AD1

Discussion can be unsuited to some tasks on the other hand, because not only problems lend themselves to group solution(s) if the group benefits from such interaction it will be for the reasons other than learning a group's answer to the questions/ A group should not waste their time considering ... matters like those of taste or personal preference.

To summarise, when the reader gets to the end of the essay, and the expectations raised in the introduction have not been met, or the writer does not seem to have sufficiently developed the topic to a logical conclusion there is the potential for a break in coherence as the reader is left wondering, "Well, what was that about?"

3.5. Cohesion-related coherence breaks

Halliday and Hasan (1976) consider that a text is a semantic unit - the unity of ideas is facilitated, or explicated, by the cohesive resources of a language, in this case English, which serve to link sections of text together whether intrasententially or extrasententially (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:2-7). This means that the interpretation of one part of the text, e.g. a pronoun, is dependent upon another part of the text, its antecedent in this example (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:8-12, 308-310). Cohesive devices thus serve to organise and indicate the relationship between one part of the text to another (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:12-19,27). The reader picks up these linguistic cues and draws on them to interpret the sense relations of the text as "... one item provides the source for the interpretation of another" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:19).

According to reports of studies in the literature, the use of cohesive markers is a good indication of essay quality. Witte and Faigley (1981) found that highly rated essays exhibited a higher frequency of cohesive ties. But as Halliday and Hasan (1976:298,299) point out, although cohesion is a necessary component of textual quality, its chief function is to provide a sense of continuity to the text in terms of its overall semantic structure. In other words, cohesion serves to facilitate coherence by linking one part of the text to another, thus aiming for unity of ideas (cf. Pilus, 1996).

Pronominal reference is a grammatical closed system: the interpretation of a pronoun depends on the related noun to come (cataphoric reference) or the noun which has preceded it (anaphoric reference) (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:303,305).

In academic text writers are expected to identify the noun first and then refer to this using the relevant pronoun. Because reference items are specific they serve to disambiguate preceding sentences that may in themselves be ambiguous and thereby facilitate the creation of coherence in the reader's mind (1976:313). A break in coherence occurs when the reader is unable to interpret the pronominal reference item.

Witte and Faigley (1981:191) state that the use of pronominals, demonstratives and definite articles, and comparatives are all examples of reference cohesion. The examples below, not drawn from student essays, serve to exemplify these various categories of reference cohesion:

Pronominal reference cohesion:

Gulley and Leathers (1977:56) state that the small group method of learning has many educational benefits. However, they also mention various disadvantages ...

Demonstrative reference cohesion:

John advocates the use of the small group method in the tertiary situation in order to empower students to take charge of their own learning. This ...

Definite article reference cohesion:

Students have many needs, both educational and social. It is easy to see the educational needs at university but the social should not be neglected.

Comparative reference cohesion:

Traditional teaching methods may have been successful in attaining some of the goals of education, but the small group method holds the potential for greater success.

Cohesive relationships may therefore be within the text, i.e. endophoric, or link items in the text to items, e.g. situation, outside the text, i.e. exophoric (McCulley, 1983:56). This research focuses on endophoric relationships indicated by cohesive ties which serve to create textual unity, i.e. coherence.

Wikborg's (1990:134) research focused on the following cohesion problems:

- * uncertain reference ties
- * missing or misleading sentence connection
- * malfunctioning cohesive tie (The type of cohesive tie does not hold, e.g. a contrast or illustration is signalled but not borne out by the actual semantic relations established by the propositions.)
- * too great a distance between the cohesive items in a cohesive chain
- * misleading distribution of given and new information within the sentence.

Wikborg (1985:361) reports that misleading sentence connection was the third highest coherence break noted in her analysis accounting for 16% of the total number of coherence breaks (cf.2.9.3.). She attributes this to:

- * incorrect use of a conjunction
- * an incorrectly used pronoun
- * an uncertain pronominal reference or demonstrative
- * too great a distance between the pronoun used and its antecedent.

For the purposes of this study the following categories of cohesion-related breaks, in table 6 below, were focused on in the descriptive analysis of student essays as these appeared to be the most frequent on the initial readings of these essays and others from previous years.

Table 6: List of cohesion-related coherence breaks in this study

Unclear/incorrect conjunction
Uncertain pronominal reference
Incorrect reference
Too great a distance between reference ties

3.5.1. Unclear/Incorrect use of a conjunction

As indicated in 3.4.2. coherence breaks are indicated by the use of square brackets with comments in bold italics. Further comments are in brackets, in italics. Cohesive items are underlined.

In reading through the student essays it was noticed that a conjunction may be incorrectly used, or used when there should be no conjunction. The following extract from AD3, the introduction and second paragraph of the essay, will show that a conjunction, signalling the discontinuative relationship (cf. Fahnestock, 1983) has been used twice when once would have been sufficient.

Quote AD3

According to Gulley and Leathers small groups can be effective as a result of mutual relationship among its members. group also considered to be successful if it discusses the task which it has to deal with and if

it maintains a good interpersonal among its members whose personal feelings and needs are taken into account (Gulley & Leathers, 1977:57). However small group(s) may not be effective because on the other hand there is some factors that may hinder small group discussions ... ***[The use of both conjunctions as however serves to indicate the relationship also indicated by on the other hand - this would constitute one coherence break, 'unclear/incorrect use of conjunction'.]***

The category of 'unclear/incorrect use of a conjunction' can be further illustrated. Conjunctions also signal causal relationships; however, a coherence break can occur when the relationship being signalled has not been explicated in the text. AD12 demonstrates this coherence break.

Quote AD12

Through arguments they may better the standard of their English. Actually in group discussion social skills such as politeness and respect are of (the) paramount importance in order for them to work successfully. Since members of the group are rude and disrespectful there would be no progress and co-operation. ***[The use of since would indicate that the group has experienced "rude and disrespectful" behaviour but the writer has not elaborated on that beforehand, or in what follows. This would constitute a coherence break, 'unclear/incorrect use of a conjunction'.]***

(It would have been better if the student had used if to indicate a potential dysfunctional relationship rather than since which indicates that a situation has already arisen which has led to the problem of conflict. In fact there is no mention of an dysfunctional situation which could give rise to this deduction in the preceding text.)

3.5.2. Uncertain pronominal reference

Sometimes when reading through an essay it is difficult to establish the relationship to a noun as indicated by the pronoun. An extract from AD11 indicates the uncertainty of the use of the pronoun 'they'.

Quote AD11

Small group discussion is socially oriented. In a group discussion each member have to take other peoples' feeling into account. When criticising or defending views that conflict should be very constructive that conflict should not develop into personal conflict. One must not be dogmatic and self-assertive. Each member must always feel free, comfortable and identify with the group. The group can be very successful when they maintain the cohesiveness of the group. *[The antecedent reference, presumably, is to "each member" which is singular; further back in the text the antecedent could be to "One"; even further back the antecedent could perhaps be to "each member" - however, this is not clear and the use of the plural they confuses the issue - this would constitute one coherence break, 'uncertain pronominal reference'.]*

3.5.3. Incorrect reference

When the student writer uses a pronoun or demonstrative incorrectly the reader may be puzzled as to what the writer means, and so the construction of overall coherence is interrupted. The following introduction demonstrates this interruption to the smooth processing of the text:

Quote AD5

The use of the small group is a good method of teaching because they have the potential to develop our minds by discussing our ideas. In this essay I am going to discuss the small group situation where thinking is

tested and referred to (John, 1994:5). *[The antecedent to they is not recoverable from the text - this constitutes one coherence break, 'incorrect reference'.] (They does not refer to the ideas of the students or to their minds (both plural nouns). Rather the student should have used the singular 'it', but it would have been better to have used the demonstrative 'this'.)*

Another example serves to illustrate this specific category - *incorrect reference*.

Quote AD9

In the communicative interaction they *[Uncertain pronominal reference, "they]* have clearly stated the "the most frequent kind is the direct conversation interchange characteristics of committees, conference and public panels" (Gully & Leathers, 1977:56). *["kind" refers to? Counted as incorrect reference]* The purpose of that *[Reference to "that" and following "that" is unclear, and regarded as incorrect reference]* is to clarify that in the small group each and every individual have the ability to speak and listern. Also proven on our text *["text", uncertain or incorrect reference]* that we need a lot to interact as small group. "There are many benefits to be gained from being an effective member of one of the many different types of groups that are open to you" John(page 117)

3.5.4. Too great a distance between cohesive ties

Neuner (1987) reports that the length of cohesive chains (three or more cohesive ties which relate to each other semantically) are indicators of good essays. This means that the writer is able to sustain the topic relationships over longer distances of text (lexical collocations, reiterations, synonyms, superordinate and their reference pronouns all linked together semantically) (Neuner, 1987:96-97). This notion of cohesive chain sustaining a semantic relationship has influenced my decisions on whether or not there is too great a distance between cohesive

items. For example, at times the distance between a pronoun and its antecedent is too great to establish the relationship which may be indicated. This is, of course, may be considered a subjective judgement on my part. The following example from AD15 will indicate that too great a distance between a pronoun and its antecedent is compounded further when the antecedent heads another paragraph (please note that John is the surname of a female writer).

Quote AD15

In as far as John ... is concerned the potential educational benefits are more than enough and to spare when one learns through small group discussions: they develop the skills of debate and argument; testing and refining thinking, practising cognitive skills; enhancing learning and empowering the learning, shifting the responsibility for learning to the learner; improving learner articulacy and listening skills; acquiring the register of a discipline; and improving competence in a second language.

She furthermore ... [In the previous paragraph the writer has mentioned many aspects of the topic (listing information) and this also detracts from the pronominal reference to John: the distance is not simply a matter of words but also a matter of shifts in topic - this would constitute one coherence break, 'too great a distance between cohesive ties'.]

3.6. The problems experienced in the descriptive analysis of LLL student academic essays

As indicated in 3.4.2., the explication of an analytical framework, which attempts to demonstrate the subjective notion of a coherence break, for this study has been difficult. Guidance has been taken from Couture (1985:68), who stresses that any analytical examination of writing must view *text*, e.g. an academic essay, as directed, multifunctional social interaction between writer and reader (cf. 2.5., 2.5.3. and 3.4.). The relationship of formal items, e.g. cohesion, to

reader response must be clearly explained in the analytical framework. Furthermore, the realisation of topic unity, or the unity of ideas (cf. Pilus, 1996), must be clearly indicated by the researcher in terms of a full range of classification categories that should adequately describe the observed linguistic behaviour.

The effect of writing on the response of the reader to this text is supported by research conducted by Hubbard (1987) on the use of cohesion by ESL writers. Hubbard (1987:9,10) found that some errors in the text made the reader's task in making a plausible interpretation for an incorrectly used cohesive item difficult but not impossible provided there was no ambiguity in the cohesive item used. If there was no definite reference or relation, interpretation by the reader could not be realised.

As what is deemed coherent is largely determined by the *reader*, any taxonomy which is posited to describe and in its use thereby quantify coherence breaks, is bound to be subjective: and this has proved to be the chief obstacle firstly, in describing a particular coherence break, and secondly, in implementing this category in the analysis (cf. 3.4.1., 3.4.2. and 3.5. for reference to difficulties in determining categories and assigning an anomaly to a specific category.)

It must be noted that ESL writers can be expected to make both grammatical and spelling errors as well as errors in expression as they have not yet reached a high level of proficiency in the target language. Furthermore, they are novices in writing academic text so they may well not follow the demands of academic writing, viz. a formal, objective, referential and analytical style. The focus of the descriptive analysis was on the demonstration of their *discourse competence* in the area of topic control and use of cohesion and how this impacts on the impression of coherence in the mind of the reader. The findings of this analysis, supported by quotes from the essays, are presented in the following chapter.

Problems with local coherence, i.e. discourse errors which only seemed to affect the sentence, for example, an incorrect pronoun used to refer to a referent in the sentence were noted, but only considered significant if they impacted on the overall impressions of coherence, i.e. the holistic coherence of the essay. Spelling mistakes and the incorrect use of verb tense were not considered as coherent breaks as the focus was mainly on the management of the essay topic, assisted by cohesion.

3.7. Testing the relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks and the HCR scores

This stage in the research procedure was to test for the following H.1. and its sub-hypotheses using the Pearson Product Moment Test for Correlation. Results were considered significant at 5% for the statistical tests administered for H.1. and H.2. (cf. Siegel, 1956:8-11). The procedure was as follows:

Essays for the three sample groups, AD, AF and BF, a total of 56 essays, comprised one group and were used to test H.1. and its sub-hypotheses.

For H.1. and its sub-hypotheses the independent variable was the frequency of coherence breaks. Types of coherence break, as per category for the sub-hypotheses, were totalled to give the frequency of the break for the essay. The dependent variable for H.1. and its sub-hypotheses was the holistic coherence rating. The scores for the HCR analysis were averaged out to provide a final HCR score for each script.

A *limitation* to this study is that a frequency count was decided upon instead of a density count, despite the length variation of the essays; although essay length had been specified, essays varied in length (from approximately 630 words to approximately 1300 words for essay one).

3.7.1. Testing the relationship between the HCR scores and percentage marks received for the essay

The Pearson Correlation Test was also used to test for H.2: the relationship between holistic coherence (the independent variable) and the percentage marks awarded for academic achievement (the dependent variable). Results were considered significant at 5%.

- i) Essays for the three sample groups, AD, AF and BF, a total of 56 essays, comprised one group and were used to test H.2.
- ii) These results were compared with the findings of the test for H.2 administered to samples AD and AF, comprising 36 essays.

3.7.2. Tutor intervention and coherence

A one-tailed *t-test* was used in the testing of H.3. and H.4. The results were checked against 17 degrees of freedom.

3.8. Summary

The ESL writer needs to manage both the topic and the overall structure of an essay if his/her intentions/purposes are to be communicated effectively (Bamberg, 1984:305-306). For an essay to be fully coherent the writer needs to manage the topic effectively by orienting the reader to the topic early on in the essay and to organise the essay argument. Cohesive ties, e.g. lexical cohesion, pronominal reference and conjunction, help facilitate a coherent structure. Shifts in topic should be marked so that the flow of the text is smooth. In short, the writer should not have to work hard at negotiating the meaning of the text in order to obtain a sense of coherence.

An essay which is beset by various difficulties, both topic- and cohesion-related, which deter the creation of coherence, is rated as incoherent. In terms of the Bamberg (1984) grid, this would mean that such an essay would receive an holistic coherence assessment of 1 or 2. The writer may assume the reader shares the context and provides no orientation with the result that the reader is unable to identify the topic. The misleading ordering of material adds to the reader's problems in constructing coherence, as does the irrelevance of the material chosen. Another difficulty arises when the writer tends to move from one possible aspect of the topic to another, digressing frequently, thus making it difficult for the reader to follow the argument of the essay. When the writer provides no sense of closure the reader may be left wondering if the writer has reached a point or not. This is evidence that the writer has no organisational plan and has either listed information or followed an associative order. The writer may use very few cohesive ties to create a sense of unity so important to coherence. Ties which are there may be incorrect, or there may be too great a distance between cohesive items in a cohesive chain so that there is no sense of interrelationship of the parts of the text. The end result is that the discourse flow is very rough and the reader, after working hard to try to link parts to the text to create a sense of unity, may find that the text is incomprehensible.

The findings of the statistical analysis are presented in the next chapter. Conclusions drawn from these findings will be discussed with reference to the essay samples as well as to the corpus of essays. The implications for targeted consideration of specified coherence breaks, in terms of academic writing, especially during the first semester at university, will be explored in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

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 - 4.3.1. The relationship between cohesion-related coherence breaks and impressions of coherence
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- 4.8. Summary

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the statistical testing of the main hypotheses and the related sub-hypotheses:

H.1. There is a negative relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks in essays and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

This hypothesis was further tested in terms of the following coherence breaks:

- H.1.1. cohesion-related coherence breaks.
- H.1.2. topic-related coherence breaks
- H.1.3. unspecified topic in introduction
- H.1.4. no elaboration of a statement made
- H.1.5. no integration of quote
- H.1.6. topic drift
- H.1.7. irrelevant content
- H.1.8. misleading paragraph division
- H.1.9. misleading ordering of content
- H.1.10. no sense of closure in the conclusion

H.2. There is a positive relationship between the holistic coherence & marks awarded to the essays.

H.3. Final drafts of essays will have lower frequencies of coherence breaks than first drafts.

H.4. Final drafts of essays will have higher holistic coherence ratings than first drafts.

The Pearson Correlation Test was applied to the samples. The significance or alpha level chosen for all cases was $p .05$ - r must be higher than .2732 to be significant. This may be interpreted as follows:

1,00	perfect correlation
0,80 to 0,99	very high correlation
0,60 to 0,79	high correlation
0,40 to 0,59	moderate correlation
0,20 to 0,39	low correlation
0,01 to 0,19	very low correlation
0,00	no correlation (cf. Siegel, 1957; Hatch & Farhady, 1982).

A *t-test*, (one-tailed, 17 degrees of freedom) was applied to samples AD and AF (36 essays) for the testing of H.3. and H.4.

The taxonomy of coherence breaks (cf. 3.5.1.) was implemented in the descriptive analysis of the essays in order to determine the nature and frequency of coherence breaks. Reference will be made to the results of this analysis, presented in table form, in the course of this chapter (cf. Appendix C for a full report on these coherence breaks for all the essays examined.)

4.2. Total frequencies of coherence breaks

The discussion of the findings, in terms of topic-control and use of cohesion, has been guided by Phelps' (1985) discussion on the two aspects of coherence (cf. 2.2.). On one hand, coherence is seen as static and text-based - the writer's choice of what aspects of topic to emphasize and how to use cohesion to do this (cf. Phelps, 1985:23-25). The other aspect sees coherence as the result of the interaction of the reader with the text and coherence is seen as having a dynamic quality, i.e. one reader's interpretation of the text and impressions of coherence

may differ from another reader's who has different expectations of the content of the text and its structure. For example, a reader with experience in ESL writing may be more willing to work with the text to create coherence; a reader more experienced with English mother-tongue writers approaches the text with his/her own expectations (cf. Meyer & Rice, 1982:165, 181). Such a reader may not be as willing to work with the text and may point to topic support, for example, as being lacking and therefore regard the text as less coherent (cf. Connor, 1984:305-307; Connor, 1990:59-66). From this point of view we can say that coherence is reader-based (cf. Phelps, 1985:22).

Sample AD refers to the draft essays, sample AF refers to the final version of this essay, and BF refers to the sample of the last essay of the semester. These essays were submitted for assessment of their holistic coherence. The total frequencies of coherence breaks, both topic-related and cohesion-related, are presented in the tables below, and are given for the samples AD, AF and BF as well as for the corpus of essays as a whole.

Table 7: Total frequencies of coherence breaks for samples AD, AF and BF (56 essays)

Coherence breaks	Number
Total topic-related coherence breaks :	234
Total cohesion-related coherence breaks :	39
Total frequency coherence breaks :	273

Table 8: Frequency of topic-related coherence breaks for samples AD, AF and BF (56 essays)

Coherence breaks	AD 1-18	AF 1-18	BF 1-20	Total
Unspecified topic	11	9	7	27
No elaboration of a statement made	12	15	22	49
No integration of quote	22	5	4	31
Topic drift	23	23	27	73
Irrelevant content	6	2	16	24
Misleading paragraph division	4	2	3	9
Misleading ordering of content	2	3	0	5
No sense of closure in conclusion	8	4	4	16
Totals	88	63	83	234

Table 9: Frequency of cohesion-related coherence breaks for samples AD, AF and BF (56 essays)

Coherence breaks	AD 1-18	AF 1-18	BF 1-20	Total
Incorrect use of conjunction	5	0	0	5
Uncertain pronominal reference	21	3	1	25
Incorrect reference	6	0	1	7
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	2	0	0	2
Totals	34	3	2	39

The frequency of these coherence breaks, both topic-related and cohesion-related, for all the essays (100) was totalled to give an overall picture of the types of coherence breaks ESL writers were most likely to make in their first experiences in academic writing at university.

With regard to the whole corpus of essays analysed (cf. Tables 10 and 11 below), the findings indicate that coherence breaks may be attributed to two main sources: topic-related, and cohesion-related. Of the total of 468 coherence breaks noted in the descriptive analysis of all 100 essays, 409 were topic-related and this discussion serves to explain further these particular types of coherence breaks and to possibly account for their occurrence. As the greater number of coherence breaks were topic-structuring coherence breaks, both for the sample groups and the essays as a whole, (cf. Table 10), it may be assumed that these have the greatest impact on the assessment of coherence by a reader.

Table 10: Frequency of topic-related coherence breaks for essay corpus (100 essays)

Coherence breaks	AD 1-18	AD 19-34	AF 1-18	AF 19-34	BF 1-20	BF 21-32	Total
Unspecified topic	11	9	9	7	7	3	46
No elaboration of a statement made	12	19	15	26	22	10	104
No integration of quote	22	3	5	10	4	8	52
Topic drift	23	6	23	5	27	3	87
Irrelevant content	6	8	2	3	16	8	43
Misleading paragraph division	4	14	2	5	3	1	29
Misleading ordering of content	2	0	3	4	0	2	11
No sense of closure in conclusion	8	12	4	9	4	0	37
Totals	88	71	63	69	83	35	409

Table 11: Frequency of cohesion-related coherence breaks for essay corpus (100 essays)

Coherence break	AD 1-18	AD 19-34	AF 1-18	AF 19-34	BF 1-20	BF 21-32	Total
Incorrect use of conjunction	5	3	0	0	0	0	11
Uncertain pronominal reference	21	4	3	6	1	4	31
Incorrect reference	6	3	0	0	1	1	14
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Totals	34	10	3	6	2	5	60

For a complete breakdown of these coherence breaks into relevant categories and frequencies please consult Appendix C.

4.3. H.1: Frequency of coherence breaks and impressions of coherence

Both topic-related and cohesion-related coherence breaks were included in the testing of this hypothesis:

H.1. There is a negative relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks in essays and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The result of the Pearson Test applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.602$, a high negative correlation.

This result indicates a significant negative correlation between the frequency of coherence breaks (both topic-related and cohesion-related) and impressions of coherence (cf. 4.1.). Therefore, we can assume that there is indeed a relationship between the frequency of coherence breaks in an essay and the holistic coherence rating received.

This main hypothesis was further tested in terms of the sub-hypotheses (cf. 3.2.1.; 3.4.2.; 4.1.).

4.3.1. The relationship between cohesion-related coherence breaks and impressions of coherence

Sub-hypothesis H.1.1. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of cohesion-related coherence breaks and holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The result of the Pearson Test applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.275$.

This result indicates a low correlation between the frequency of cohesion-related coherence breaks and impressions of coherence. The presence of cohesive devices in a text is most important, however, contributing significantly to "the reader's experience of discourse as coherent" (Phelps, 1985:24). Cohesive features, for example, conjunctions, weave the threads of the discourse together influencing the various aspects of the experience of reading:

- * by repeating words or pronouns they encourage the retention of these words/pronouns in the memory and thus help, as the reader moves through the text, to keep control on the flow of the propositions and how they relate to each other;
- * by focusing the reader's attention on the syntactic transformations of sentences, for example, fronting items for importance;
- * by laying the foundation for the prediction of structure and content , for example, by the introduction of new lexical chains which could herald another tack in the development of the topic (cf. Phelps, 1985:26,27).

In the essay samples, AD, AF and BF, the most frequent coherence break was that of ***uncertain pronominal reference*** - 25 cases out of a total of 38 cohesion-related coherence breaks (cf. Tables 7 and 8). Reference items in English include pronouns like he, she, they, for example, as well as demonstratives like this, that, these and those, plus the article the and items like such a (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1976). In academic text the norm is for the writer to first identify a referent before referring back (anaphoric reference) to it by using a pronoun. Thus, for example, writers who start a paragraph with they without indicating to the reader what they refers to lay the grounds for a break in coherence. AD9 (cf. Appendix B) exhibits this cohesion-related coherence break in particular (there were 8 cases out of a total of 10 cohesion-related coherence breaks for this specific essay).

Incorrect reference was the second highest category, accounting for seven breaks. The maximum incidence of this coherence break per essay was two (cf. AD 9 and AD10 in Appendix C).

This category was followed by ***incorrect conjunction***, five cases in all. Conjunctions (cf. 2.6., to 2.6.5.) are used to indicate relationships in the text. Conjunctive items like because and on the other hand do not merely serve to link one part of the text to another but explicate the writer's *direction of argument*. In other words, they serve a functional role in the creation of semantic unity of a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:321). Essays which showed this coherence break had no more than one example.

Too great a distance between cohesive ties i.e. the distance between the tie and its presupposed item therefore making it difficult to establish whether this is indeed the referent or not, occurred only twice.

With reference to all the essays included in the descriptive analysis (100 essays) the following was noted. Cohesion-related coherence breaks account for 60 of the overall total of 468 coherence breaks (cf. Tables 10 and 11 above). The most frequent cohesion-related coherence break is ***uncertain pronominal reference***,

accounting for 31 of the 60 cohesion-related coherence breaks (cf. AD9/AF9 in Appendix B for examples of this coherence break).

The second most common break, with 14 cases in all, was that of *incorrect reference* (cf. 2.3.2., and Appendix B, AD9/AF9 for examples). The third most frequent category is that of *incorrect use of conjunction*, with 11 cases in all.

Both the samples, AD, AF and BF and the whole essay corpus demonstrate that the ESL writers in this study find *pronominal reference* the most difficult aspect of cohesion.

The cohesive devices evident in the essays were not counted and this is a limitation in this study which has emerged. It could be that ESL writers avoid using conjunctions, for example, because they are not aware, firstly, of their function, and secondly, of the range of options available to them (cf. Lieber, 1981:280-284). For writing to be coherent students need to be able to manipulate the text and signal its logical structure, e.g. using firstly to indicate the commencement of an argument (cf. Fries, 1986:19). Furthermore, it is suggested that the use of reference is dependent, on the writer's vocabulary, e.g. the use of hyponymy implies that the writer knows what items relate to others in terms of meaning. Both Connor (1984:307-310) and Johns (1990:212-219) point out that one of the main problems facing the ESL writer, new to academic discourse, is a limited vocabulary in the target language.

4.3.2. The relationship between topic-related coherence breaks and impressions of coherence

The notion of *topic* refers to the discourse theme of the text (Wikborg, 1985:363,362) and how it is managed throughout the essay (cf. 2.7. to 2.7.4.).

Sub-hypothesis H.1.2. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of **topic-related** coherence breaks and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The result of the Pearson Test applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.589$.

This is a significant finding, indicating a moderate, moving towards a high, negative correlation, i.e. we can assume that there is indeed a relationship between the frequency of topic-related coherence breaks and impressions of coherence.

One of the needs of the audience is that topic development should remain focused throughout if the essay is to seem coherent. McCagg (1990:21) cites Enkvist (1990) who says that a text is coherent when the reader of the text is able "... to construct a 'plausible' world order around the text". As McCagg points out coherence is not simply dependent on the surface features of the text, e.g. the use of conjunctions to link clauses and sentences in the construction of a textual unit of discourse, "but is also established in part by implicit relations suggested by the content of text propositions" (McCagg, 1990:21). If the text propositions do not relate to the topic question then a major coherence break is set up for the text processor (3.1., 3.2.4., 3.4.2.). McCagg refers to Givon's (1986, in McCagg, 1990:23) list of discourse pragmatics, stressing that writers must control these functions if the reader is to understand the text.

Thus, topic management is crucial to the reader in gaining a sense of the coherence of an essay (cf. Wikborg, 1990:133). Coherence breaks can occur for any number of reasons. For example:

- * the reader cannot work out the topic

- * there are sudden and inexplicable change in topic
- * the logical relations between sentences may be difficult to work out
- * an inference may be made that is difficult to follow (Wikborg, 1990:133).

From the results of this research it appears that the most prevalent problems are in the area of topic control. This implies that the student writer needs to set a framework for the reader to follow, which in turn raises expectations about the content of the essay.

The following sections will present the findings of the statistical analyses of the sub-hypotheses of H.1. which are topic-related. Tests are administered to all the samples, i.e. AD, AF and BF (56 essays) for these individual coherence breaks.

4.3.3. Unspecified topic in introduction

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.3. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *unspecified topic in introduction*, and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The results of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.403$.

This indicates that there is a moderate negative correlation between *unspecified topic in introduction* and impressions of coherence. Overall, this is the fifth most common coherence break (see Table 8 above). In sample AD there are 11 examples which dropped to nine on the final essay by the same set of students (cf. schedule of coherence breaks in Appendix C.)

By specifying the topic, *expectations* are created in the mind of the reader as to what the discourse is about (Scarcella, 1984:678). Once specified it is assumed

that the writer will focus on the topic throughout the essay (McKenna, 1985). Williams (1985, in Swales, 1990:189), writes that coherence results when the text

... meets the decoder's expectations of what the discourse should be, given his perception of the context, goals and intentions underlying the language event.

Even if the writer does not explicitly state the topic but provides sufficient cues of the context to the reader, the essay will be partially coherent (Bamberg, 1984:317). For example, when the writer situates the topic in a context the reader can draw on this to create coherence (McKenna, 1987:78). The problem arises when the topic is not identified and this hinders the reader from integrating the text into a coherent whole (Bamberg, 1984:318). Indeed Bamberg (1983:422) notes that writers of incoherent essays (essays which receive an HCR of 1 or 2) often fail to identify the essay topic even when given explicit writing instructions.

4.3.4. No elaboration of a statement made

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.4. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *no elaboration of a statement made*, and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The results of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.210$.

This finding indicates a very low correlation between *no elaboration of a statement made* and impressions of coherence and as such is not significant.

However, this category was the second highest overall, i.e. for all 100 essays, accounting for 104 topic-related coherence breaks. The variance between the results of the statistical analysis and the frequency of this coherence break, which should point to it playing a significant role in holistic coherence, could be a subjective judgement on the part of this reader. After teaching students about the necessity to exemplify and clarify the relevance of statements made in topic development in an essay, I as a reader-tutor, expect this to be done, whereas other readers may not find a lack of elaboration problematic in establishing coherence when reading an essay. Lieber (1981) comments that if the writer expects his/her only reader to be the teacher then it seems

quite natural for him to leave unspecified those things which he can assume to be shared information, whether that information is found in the student's own background, on the sheet of topics, or in material read and discussed in class (Lieber, 1981:257).

An assumption of a shared frame of reference, therefore, could lead the writer to not expand on statements made or points raised in the topic development of his/her essay. Furthermore, the tutor/reader of the essay may be more prepared to bridge the gaps in understanding because of his/her knowledge of the prescribed readings for the essays, i.e. is better equipped to make inferences than a reader ignorant of the material. In reference to the reader establishing coherence, Phelps (1985:21) comments that the reader integrates parts of the text in an attempt to reach a "wholeness in its meaning". When a reader has to work hard to integrate parts of the essay to form a whole this could be due to a lack of support which could be overcome if the writer expands on what has been written at crucial points in the topic development.

It is interesting to note that the frequency of this coherence break for the sample groups AD and AF and the rest of the essays, AD19-34 and AF19-34 (cf. Table 8) increased in the final essay. It could have been expected that once the writer's attention had been drawn to this problem in the draft this would have

been attended to in the final essay. A possible explanation is that these ESL writers are still developing the argument skills needed to express their points of view in their essays. For example, Connor (1990:58) comments that the writer needs to be aware of the needs of his reader and provide topic support. By justifying claims asserted, i.e. elaborating on a statement made, the writer is establishing the credibility of his/her claim before moving on in the essay argument (Connor, 1990:64-65).

4.3.5. No integration of quote

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.5. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *no integration of quote* and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

Results of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.329$

This indicates a moderate negative correlation between *no integration of quote* and impressions of coherence. This category accounted for 52 coherence breaks, the fourth highest overall in this study. What is interesting is that the draft sample AD accounted for 22 of these, but this dropped to five in the final version of the essay, AF. By the time the second essay of the semester was written there were only 12 examples of a failure to integrate a quote from source material for the 32 essays available, i.e. all the draft essays for topic #1, written by the same students in AD1-34, and AF1-34. The students had obviously taken their instructions to relate the quote to the essay topic into consideration.

To create a coherent text the writer must be able to present relevant information in support of his/her argument at appropriate junctures in the text and this includes quotes from source materials, e.g. prescribed readings, which ensures

that the reader of the text develops a "... proper appreciation of the foreground/backbone/main line" according to McCagg (1990:22), in reference to Givon's (1986, in McCagg 1990) function of background information, which implies skill in the organising of topic-relevant material.

4.3.6. Topic drift

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.6. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *topic drift*, and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The results of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.341$.

This indicates a moderate negative correlation between *topic drift* and impressions of coherence. However, in her study Wikborg (1985:361) found this to be the fourth most frequent type of coherence break, accounting for 10% of coherence breaks overall. In this present study, an inexplicable drift in topic accounted for 87 coherence breaks, some 16% of the total of topic-related coherence breaks - this category was the third highest.

Accounting for this discrepancy between the significance of this break in terms of its impact on coherence and the results of the descriptive analysis could mean again the citing of subjectivity of the reader-tutor. After going through the process of topic analysis and discussing the relevance of the prescribed readings in small groups and the use of topic-controlling sentences and organisational devices such as spider diagrams, I, as reader-tutor expect the students to implement these strategies in their writing. Perhaps other raters of holistic coherence are more tolerant of instances of topic drift. However, managing to "keep to the point" does seem to be problematic for these particular student writers. For example, in the sample group both the draft (AD) and final (AF) had

23 examples of topic drift. However, by the time the second essay, BF, was written, without the benefit of tutor feedback in a draft (c.f. 1.6.), this type of coherence break had decreased (cf. Table 12).

Process writing calls for revisions of the original draft (cf. 1.5., 1.6.). The changes made in these revisions can lead to more topic-focused and therefore more coherent writing. For example, Witte (1983:330-332) found that more highly rated writers reduced the amount of topics from their original drafts via a process of selection based on whether or not the topic was essential to the development of the overall discourse theme. Not only did these writers tend to reduce the number of topics, they also tended to develop those chosen to remain in the essay more fully. Lower-rated writers seemed to lack the facility to select and expand on topic content, and therefore, focused less on the discourse theme than more highly-rated writers with a consequent loss of coherence (Witte, 1983:330-331).

4.3.7. Irrelevant content used

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.7. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *irrelevant content* and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The result of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.279$.

This indicates a low negative correlation between *irrelevant content* and impressions of coherence. Wikborg (1985:360-361) refers to this coherence break in her study although it did not occur in her five most frequent categories of coherence breaks. In this study there were 43 cases of irrelevant material used in topic development and it was the sixth most frequent category.

The descriptive analysis of the essays (cf. Appendix C) shows that there were six cases of this coherence break in the draft essay, AD, which decreased to two in the final version of the first essay, AF. However, there were 16 cases in the sample group (BF) of essays for the second essay topic of the semester. A possible explanation for this increase in the frequency of this coherence break could be that the essay topic (on the nature of academic reading as an interactive process) involved drawing from challenging articles as source material. The essay was not given to the tutor to assess the student's understanding of the readings and so it is possible that students were unsure as to whether or not the information taken from their readings was relevant to the essay topic.

4.3.8. Misleading paragraph division

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.8. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *misleading paragraph division*, and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The result of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.028$

This indicates a very low negative correlation between *misleading paragraph division* and impressions of coherence. Wikborg (1990, in Connor & Johns, 1990:135) found that this category accounted for 21% of the coherence breaks in her study, the second most frequently occurring category. She feels that irrespective of differences in genre, paragraphing plays a significant role in the structuring of well-formed essays; especially in texts with few alternative structuring devices "paragraph divisions are the central topic-shift markers ... their removal seriously impairs the coherence of the passage" (Wikborg, 1990:136). In this study, *misleading paragraph division* accounted for 29 cases

of coherence break and was the second least-frequent category. In the second essay of the semester there were only four cases in 32 essays.

"Correct" paragraphing is evidence of the writer's overall organisational plan for the development of the topic and points to text-based factors. Bamberg (1983:423), for example, notes that when writers fail to arrange the details of an essay according to an overall plan this constitutes a barrier to integrating the text into a coherent whole in the mind of the reader. Meyer and Rice (1982:156) comment that the organisation of a text cues the reader into the writer's emphasis on a topic by implicitly or explicitly suggesting the schematic structure used to interpret the topic, as certain details are emphasized and others subordinated to support the major topic development.

The writer's decision in the structuring of paragraphs generally seems to be governed by changes in topic or shifts in generality (Wikborg, 1990:136,140), such as when the writer moves from the general to the particular (Bamberg, 1983:423). This is what Givon (1986, in McCagg, 1990:23) would refer to as the larger thematic organisation and these various levels must be signalled. Paragraphing thus acts as a form of "punctuation" setting out the argument of the essay and serves as the central markers of topic shift (Wikborg, 1990:136).

4.3.9. Misleading ordering of content

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.9. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *misleading ordering of content*, and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The results of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.201$

This is a very low negative correlation between *misleading ordering of content* and impressions of coherence and as such is not significant. In this study there were 11 cases of this coherence break out of a total of 409 instances of topic-related coherence breaks, and it was the least frequent category. Although forming part of Wikborg's (1985:360) taxonomy of coherence breaks, she does not report that it was a significant category in terms of the five most frequent types of coherence breaks which were evident in her findings. For my part, I found that deciding on whether or not materials had been presented in an "incorrect" order very difficult to determine as this was largely dependent on my expectations of the content of the essay (cf. Phelps, 1985:21-22).

4.3.10. No sense of closure in the conclusion

The following sub-hypothesis H.1.10. was tested:

There is a negative relationship between the frequency of the coherence break, *no sense of closure in the conclusion*, and the holistic coherence ratings of essays.

The results of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = -0.254$

This indicates a low negative correlation between *no sense of closure in the conclusion* and impressions of coherence. This category does not form part of Wikborg's (1985;1990) study. In this study there were 37 cases of problems with the conclusion, the seventh most frequent category out of nine altogether. It can be noted that writers had fewer problems with their conclusions by the time they wrote their second essay. Bamberg (1984:318) notes that one of the characteristics of an incoherent essay is that there is no sense of closure.

To conclude this discussion of the findings of the testing of H.1. and its sub-hypotheses the following is noted: the ESL teacher cannot ignore that cohesive markers do play a significant role in facilitating impressions of the coherence of the essay in terms of signposting topic development, indicating relationships in the text etc. and this needs to be drawn to the attention of the ESL writer. Cohesive devices are thus surface markers signalling underlying propositional relationships which are realised semantically. Expectations are created in the mind of the reader when s/he encounters the conjunctive markers. For example, the use of the junctive and creates an expectation in the mind of the text processor that some further information is to follow (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981:50-52). A relationship of contrajunction, referred to by other researchers such as Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Carpenter and Hunter (1981) as an adversative relationship, is signalled most often by the use of the words but, however, yet, nevertheless, on the other hand etc.

Furthermore, it can be noted that the frequency of coherence breaks tends to decrease by the time the students write the final essay of the semester. This would indicate the following:

- * There is value to the process approach (cf. 1.5., 1.6., 2.5.1.) which calls for drafting, redrafting and editing, not just on the superficial level but on the deeper underlying organisation of meaning (cf. Zamel, 1982).
- * On the whole, student writers do take cognisance of tutor input when they rewrite their essays as sample AF demonstrates fewer coherence breaks overall than sample AD, and tend to implement these insights into the skills needed to write academic essays, e.g. integrating quotes, by the time they write the final essay of the semester.

4.4. H.2. Testing the relationship between the holistic ratings of coherence and marks awarded to the essays

The following hypothesis was tested:

H.2. There is a positive relationship between the impressions of coherence and marks awarded to the essays

The results of Pearson applied to:

AD, AF and BF: $r = 0.536$

This indicates a moderate positive correlation between percentage marks and the HCR. Although these findings are important for encouraging the specific teaching of strategies for coherence to the ESL writer (cf. Pilus, 1996), it must be noted that marks awarded for academic performance are not based on coherence alone, albeit a significant contributing factor, but include the following:

- * content of essay
- * demonstration of understanding of prescribed readings
- * demonstration of depth of argument
- * demonstration of correct use and citing of sources.

It must also be noted that different genres may call for other factors to be considered when assessing academic performance in writing tasks.

4.5. H.3. Testing to determine the influence of tutor feedback on the frequencies of coherence breaks

The following hypothesis was tested:

H.3. Final drafts of essays will have lower frequencies of coherence breaks than first drafts.

The results of the one-tailed *t-test* applied to AD, AF and BF is that the *t*-value is 3,85, meaning that support is found for the hypothesis at a very high level of significance ($p < .001$). This finding is statistically very significant, presenting strong support for H₃. Therefore we can assume that tutor feedback does have a positive effect as final drafts of essays have fewer coherence breaks than first drafts.

This finding is further supported by the following discussion. The final results of the tally of the coherence breaks per essay, the schedules on the type and number of coherence breaks per essay and the results of the Holistic Coherence Assessment have been studied, (cf. tables 12 and 13), to see if tutor intervention has had the desired result of reducing coherence breaks.

Table 12: Frequency of coherence breaks: samples AD, AF

Essay	AD CB's	AF CB's
1	8	7
2	6	1
3	10	5
4	2	3
5	10	5
6	6	6
7	6	3
8	15	12
9	20	6
10	12	10
11	4	0
12	3	6
13	5	0
14	3	0
15	4	0
16	1	0
17	6	2
18	1	0
Total	122	66

With reference to table 12, the frequency of coherence breaks in the sample AD is 122 in total, 88 being topic-related and the 34 cohesion-related. In AF there are 66 coherence breaks in all, 63 being topic-related, 3 cohesion-related. In the last essay of the semester there were a total of 85 coherence breaks, 83 of these being topic-related. Broadly speaking, one could suggest that tutor intervention could have led to some improvement in the coherence of the essays in terms of the frequency of coherence breaks.

4.6. H.4. Testing to see if final essays give higher impressions of coherence

The following hypothesis was tested:

H.4. Final drafts of essays will have higher holistic coherence ratings than first drafts.

The results of the *t-test* applied to AD, AF and BF indicated at *t*-value of 2,20 which meets the .05 level of significance. This finding is therefore statistically significant and lends support to H.4.

By comparing the results of the HCR assessment on both draft and final versions of the same essay we can arrive at a general conclusion that, in the main, essays written in terms of the process approach to writing, (cf. 2.2., 3.4.2., 4.3.2., 4.3.10.), do improve in coherence, albeit in some cases only marginally. Table 13, (cf. page 142), reports on the HCR results for the draft and final essay provides, and provides input for the discussion which follows.

A HCR of 1 or 2 indicates that the essay is rated as incoherent; an HCR of 3 indicates a degree of coherence with an HCR of 4 given to an essay rated as fully coherent (cf. Appendix B). If one looks at the results of the Holistic Coherence assessment for the draft essay, AD, as compared to the final version of the essay, AF, seven of the essays went up a grade in coherence:

AD4 from 3 to 4, in the final version AF4;

AD8 from an HCR of 1 to 2, in the final version, AF8, a slightly lesser degree of incoherence;

AD16 from an HCR of 3 to 4 in the final version AF16.

Table 13: Samples AD and AF

Essay	HCR AD	HCR AF
1	2	2
2	2	4
3	2	2
4	3	4
5	1	3
6	2	2
7	2	2
8	1	2
9	2	1
10	2	2
11	3	3
12	3	3
13	2	2
14	3	2
15	2	3
16	3	4
17	2	3
18	3	3

Four essays went from being rated as incoherent to being coherent:

AD2 from an HCR of 2 to 4, in the final version AF2;

AD5 from an HCR of 1 to 3, in the final version AF5;

AD15 from an HCR of 2 to 3, in the final version AF15;

AD17 from an HCR of 2 to 3, in the final version AF17.

There were, however, two exceptions:

AD9 went from an HCR of 2 to an HCR of 1, in the final version AF9, indicating a decrease in coherence;

AD14 went from being rated as coherent, i.e. an HCR of 3, to being rated as incoherent, i.e. an HCR of 2, in the final version AF14, although the frequency of coherence breaks dropped from 3 to nil.

Five essays in sample AD were rated as coherent, all given an HCR of 3. In sample AF nine were rated as coherent, three of these as completely coherent, i.e. 4. In sample AD two essays were seen as incoherent and in AF only one. Overall, the students' essays seemed to improve in coherence from the draft to the final version of the essay.

As the raters did not assess the HCR for the same AD and AF essay this would suggest that what is viewed as coherent is a subjective assessment and is a methodological limitation in this study. One rater did comment that being familiar with the prescribed readings did influence his view of what could be considered a coherent development of the topic in the essay argument.

4.7. Further discussion of the analyses

This section serves to elaborate further on the reporting of the findings (cf. 4.2. to 4.6.), noting the significance of the frequency and interrelationship of the

coherence breaks, (cf. 4.7.2.), and the impact of tutor feedback, specifically with regard to *topic control*, by referring to a particular group of essays, (cf. 4.7.3.), and then concentraing on a specific essay as an example (cf. 4.7.4.).

4.7.1. Frequency of coherence breaks and significance

Coherence breaks which have high frequency are not necessarily significant in terms of the correlation test applied to the sample essays. For example, although ***no elaboration of a statement made*** is the most frequently occurring coherence break in the whole corpus of essays, and the second most frequent coherence break in the samples, the findings of the Pearson Correlation Test indicates a very low significance (cf. 4.3.4.). This coherence break seems to be confined to a few essays. For example, AD/AF1, AD5, BF4, BF6 and BF19 were the only essays which had more than three cases of this coherence break.

With reference to the descriptive analysis of the essay samples, AD, AF and BF, the most common coherence break was that of ***topic drift***, with 73 cases out of a total of 234 topic-related coherence breaks. Essay A8 has the highest incidence of ***topic drift***, six cases (cf. Appendix B). The incidence of this break is quite consistent from sample to sample, viz. AD 23; AF 23 and BF 27 cases. In the whole essay corpus there were 87 cases of inexplicable drifts in topic. The results of the Pearson Test indicates a significant relationship between this coherence break and impressions of coherence (4.3.6.).

No integration of quote, the third most frequent category in the essay samples, accounts for 31 cases in all, 22 occurring in the draft essay. Failing to integrate quotes from sources into the essay argument, accounts for 52 of the topic-related coherence breaks (cf. Table 7) in the essay corpus; with a decrease in this coherence break as students have more experience in essay writing. By the time the second essay is written, students seem to be more aware of the necessity to integrate quotes. The results of the Pearson Correlation Test applied to the essay samples indicates that this is a significant coherence break (cf. 4.3.6.).

The use of *irrelevant content*, not related to the development of the topic accounts for 24 cases of this coherence break in the essay samples, and for 43 coherence breaks (cf. Table 9) altogether. It is interesting to note that the highest incidence of this coherence break occurs in sample BF. One could expect that students, by the time they wrote their second essay, would be aware of the need to only use relevant essay material. However, as this essay was quite challenging in terms of content, and written without the benefit of tutor intervention, students may have found the choosing of relevant content from source materials quite a difficult task. Jacobs (1982, in Inglis and & Kuanda, 1996:7) found that the ability to produce coherent text is dependent on the writer's ability to organise essay material relevant to the writing task. However, the results of the Pearson Correlation Test indicated a moderate negative degree of significance between this coherence break and impressions of coherence (cf. 4.3.7.).

4.7.2. The interrelationship of coherence breaks

As the descriptive analysis of the essays reveals, (cf. Appendix B), there seems to be an inter-play between coherence breaks: essays which indicate problems in one area of topic control often indicate problems in other areas. For example, in AD9 the coherence break *unspecified topic* is followed by *uncertain pronominal reference*, then by *no integration of quote*, cases of *incorrect reference*, followed by other indicated coherence breaks finally to *topic drift*:

AD9

The small group has more advantages of teaching although there are some disadvantages but the most relevant fact is that advantages is playing a major role Gulley and Leather, has given us how small group can communicate effectively. **[No statement signposting the direction the essay argument will take - counted as Unspecified Topic]**

In the communicative interaction they **[Uncertain pronominal reference]** have clearly stated the "the most frequent kind is the direct conversation

interchange characteristics of committees, conference and public panels" (Gully & Leathers, 1977:56). *[No integration of quote]* The purpose of that *[Incorrect reference]* is to clarify that in the small group each and every individual have the ability to speak and listern. Also proven on our text *["text", uncertain or incorrect reference]* that we need a lot to interact as small group. "There are many benefits to be gained from being an effective member of one of the many different types of groups that are open to you" John(page 117)

We also be given another factor that tells us how to gain from group interaction. They *[uncertain pronominal reference]* stated clearly that "small group have employed discussion in wide-ranging activities and diverse situations because it has some obvious strengths" (Gulley & Leathers, 1977:56). *[No integration of quote, compounded by reference to "it"]* We also find that in group interaction there are limitations but is strong enough and consisted of committed.*[Topic drift from "gain in group interaction" to "limitations" which does not serve to lead to the topic of the next paragraph]*

The cumulative effect of these coherence breaks is a low coherence rating (this essay was given an HCR of 2).

There also appears to be an inter-relationship between coherence breaks, i.e. writers who experience problems in one area of topic management, frequently experience problems in another area. For example, fourteen essays which demonstrated problems with including *irrelevant content* also had problems in *elaborating* on points made in the essay argument (cf. Appendix C).

This tendency to be unable to organise the support of a claim in an essay argument, as well as an inability to relate the sub-topics to the overall discourse theme, could lead to breaks in the impression of coherence when the reader processes the text (Wikborg, 1990). As this was the second most common topic-

related coherence break in the essay samples, and overall, there were 104 cases, *elaboration* on a point made should be assumed, therefore, to be an important consideration by the writer if s/he is to write more coherent text (cf. 4.3.1.). Eleven of the essays which showed problems in elaborating on information also showed difficulty in *integrating quotes*, for example, into the essay. argument (cf. Appendix C).

Jacobs (1982, in Inglis & Kuanda, 1996:7) found that her one group of students produced work that was detailed (which would indicate that points made were elaborated on) but often difficult to follow, as the relationship between the content used and the essay topic could not always be established. This observation could also be applied to the use of quotes from source material which do not appear to play a functional role in the student's essay text.

The second least frequently occurring coherence break in both essay samples and the essay corpus was that of *misleading paragraph division*. There were nine cases in the samples, and 29 cases in the essay corpus (cf. Appendix C). According to Wikborg (1990) if a *paragraph break* has a specific function, i.e. a rhetorical function, for example, to give special emphasis to a statement, then it does not constitute a coherence break. However, if the break does not serve such a rhetorical function then it can mislead the reader into thinking that a new aspect of the topic is to be developed or another topic is to be discussed. When the writer continues with the same topic this can confuse the reader whose expectation have not be fulfilled (Wikborg, 1990:135-136). Writers who split paragraphs which are linked in topic development may also show their indecision within the paragraph; in these essays there were six cases of topic shift which were not explicitly indicated.

In the whole corpus of essays submitted to the descriptive analysis, (cf. Appendix C), 22 essays show problems both in the introduction and conclusion. Lack of closure in the conclusion of an essay accounts for 37

coherence breaks in all. Of these, there were 29 essays which also had problems in establishing topic focus at the paragraph level. Lack of elaboration was also evident in 14 of these essays. Nine of these same essays failed to orient the reader in the introduction. These findings appear to indicate that students who experience difficulty in organising topic content do so at various points in the essay.

4.7.3. Discussion of findings of essays in respect of a specific example

The purpose of this section is to support the argument that students do develop skills in writing more coherent text. This improvement can be facilitated by tutor intervention at the drafting, and re-drafting stages of the essay-writing process (cf. 1.5., 1.6., 2.3., 2.3., 4.3.2., 4.3.10., 4.5.). In support of this suggestion, we will now focus on the nine students in samples AD and AF who were also represented in BF. We now consider, by following the progress of nine students, whether *tutor intervention* has had some positive effect on essays in terms of improved coherence

We first consider the *holistic coherence ratings* given to the essays written by these students. Of the nine students whose HCR results are reported below, three students' essays, 6, 8, 15, showed an improvement from being rated as initially incoherent, (an HCR of 1 or 2), to achieving a measure of coherence in the final essay, (an HCR of 3 or 4). The writer of 15 showed a pleasing improvement: the final essay for the semester, i.e. essay topic #2, was not handed in for tutor feedback and this essay was rated as coherent (cf. Appendix B for copies of both the first and final draft of essays written by students 8, 9 and 15).

Two essays, written by students 11 and 18, were given an HCR of 3 for all three essays written. The essays written by student number 4 showed an improvement in that the HCR went from 3 to 4; i.e. by the final essay of the semester this writer was producing work regarded as fully coherent.

Writer number 9 was still finding difficulty in writing coherent text, cf. the final draft (AF) where the coherence rating dropped from 2 to 1, as can be seen in the following table which shows the HCR's of the essays written by the same student.

Table 14: The HCR values of scripts written by students common to the three sample groups: AD, AF, and BF

Student number	HCR AD	HCR AF	HCR BF
4	3	4	4
6	2	2	3
8	1	2	3
9	2	1	2
11	3	3	3
15	2	3	3
17	2	3	2
18	3	3	3

With regard to student writer number 17, although the final version of the first essay was rated as coherent, the final essay of the semester, (BF), was rated as being incoherent, i.e. HCR of 2. The writer of this essay could therefore benefit from more tutor feedback.

These findings could suggest that students who start out writing incoherent text at the beginning of the semester may improve, in terms of coherence, over the semester. This may be due to tutor feedback and the student having a greater understanding of how to write an academic essay. As the background study to this research suggests (cf. Appendix A for the full report) these particular ESL students have had very limited essay-writing experience prior to entering university. Johns (1990:213), in reference to the situation in American universities, notes that ESL students have done very little writing beyond the

paragraph and that what writing they have done is generally in the narrative, completed in their English classes, in which the audience is limited to an English teacher or the students' peers.

When considering the *frequency of topic-related coherence breaks* we see, from Table 15, that the first draft of the essay written for topic 1, (i.e. the draft AD), has more coherence breaks than the final draft, (AF). Except for writers 17 and 18 the frequency of coherence breaks has dropped by the last essay of the semester, (essay BF). This shows an improvement, over time, in managing topic development in an essay.

Table 15: Frequency of topic-related coherence breaks in essays written by the same subject

Student number	CB's AD	CB's AF	CB's BF
4	2	3	0
6	8	7	0
8	14	13	3
9	15	12	4
11	3	1	2
15	7	0	0
17	9	2	9
18	4	0	5

With respect to the *frequency of cohesion-related coherence breaks* we note, from Table 16, a decrease in the frequency of cohesion-related coherence breaks, viz. essays written by students 8, 9, 11, and 15, by the final essay.

Table 16: Frequency of cohesion-related coherence breaks in essays written by the same student

Student number	CB's AD	CB's AF	CB's BF
4	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
8	2	0	0
9	10	0	0
11	4	0	0
15	2	0	0
17	0	0	0
18	0	0	0

The use of cohesion may also be linked to increasing discourse competence. Evensen (1985a, in Evensen, 1990:171, in Connor & Johns, 1990) and Rygh (1986, in Evensen, 1990:171) found that more advanced writers tended to increase their use of such connectors to structure their text. Evensen's research into the relationship between local or surface coherence, i.e. the coherent relationships between sentences effected by logical connectors, and holistic or global coherence, as evidence of the underlying propositional structure of the text, has important implications for the teaching of writing to the EFL and ESL student: students do need to know how to use logical connectors like conjunctions but they also need to see that these are reflections of topic development, i.e. the underlying semantic configuration as determined by the propositional structure (Evensen, 1990:171-173).

But cohesion alone does not make for coherent writing (cf. 2.). We write for an audience (cf. 1.5., 1.6., 2.2.), and although the perception of writing quality by readers is affected by the manner in which the essay is organised (Enkvist, 1990:22-23); the reader plays a significant, dynamic role in relating her/his schema to the text content (cf. 2.2.). This latter aspect of the interaction of the

reader's schema with the text content is largely outside the writer's control as no one can correctly predict just what knowledge and experience the reader brings to the text.

4.7.4. The influence of tutor feedback on topic control with reference to a specific example

The following discussion seeks to build on the points raised in 4.5. Many writing tasks for the ESL student involve integrating information from other sources, in the LLL course this involves drawing from academic readings. This demands the following skills:

- * setting a framework for the reader to follow
- * choosing the relevant material to use
- * elaborating on statements made or points raised
- * integrating information, e.g. quotes, into the essay structure.

The value of the process approach to writing is that tutor feedback encourages writers to re-draft their essays and focus more on the demands of the topic (cf. Angelil-Carter & Eberhard Thesen, 1990). The following discussion serves to demonstrate the value of tutor input and increasing topic control by the writer (cf. 4.3.10., 4.5., 4.7.).

The importance of topic control can be explicated by reference to a specific writer, student number 5. The first draft version of the essay, AD5, which had 14 coherence breaks (10 of which were topic-related), received a mark of 40% and an HCR of 1, i.e. it was rated as incoherent.

We first consider the draft copy, which serves to illustrate the argument that a coherence break in one area of the text can lead to other coherence breaks. In this case the initial break in coherence was caused a lack of elaboration on the statements made. This seemed to cause the writer to lose focus with the resultant drift in topic. However, the principal coherence break was determined

as one of *no elaboration of a statement made*. Firstly, the topic organising sentence of the first paragraph, which should set the focus of the paragraph, states that the small group situation "is a good place" in contrast to the lecture situation. However, there is no elaboration on what is meant by a "good place". Secondly, a lack of clarity by "Student do not pay attention ..." would be overcome if there had been some elaboration, relating this statement to the overall topic. The second paragraph starts off by noting that the small group discussion situation offers the "... potential to develop our mind" . The *topic drifts* to the idea that by participating and being active in discussion the group can "... be successful". The topic in the following paragraph changes where it is noted that the group can be successful if the members feel free and comfortable. The link between the development of the mind via discussion and the success of a group needs to be more carefully developed if the reader is have some impression of coherence.

Quote AD5

Furthermore a small group situation is a good place rather than using lecture. Lecture work is to come in the class and teach that subject he/she did not have time to discuss the things that you do not understand, Whereas in small group you have an opportunity to discuss with other members. In lecture room there are many student you cannot work together other student do not pay attention at the end you did not gain even one information. This method is not good. *(The reader is introduced to the discourse theme by the provision of sufficient background context to the essay topic - it is assumed that the reader is familiar with the context of the small group)*

Small group discussion situation give as an potential to develop our mind. You can develop by discussing and thinking the things which is relevant in that task, It help you see where is weak or good. You

must try by all means that you participate and active in order you group to be successful *[No elaboration] (what is meant by "successful", in terms of?)*

Compare the above with the reworked final version, AF5, below, which had 5 coherence breaks, an HCR of 3, i.e. it was rated as coherent. The mark given was 50%.

Quote AF5

In 3L, small group discussion is better way of learning rather than using the lecture. lecturer's work is to come in the class and teach that subject, he/she does not have time to discuss the thing you do not understand, in a small group you have an opportunity to ask other members to clarify the things you are not clear about, whereas in a lecture room the student is not organised, you cannot work together because there are overcrowding students. Others do not pay attention, busy talking. At the end you fail to get all the information that the lecturer said. It is not a good method of learning, the lecturer suppose to teach approximately *(problems with tense do not detract from the coherence of the essay)*fourty student *(neglecting the plural does not detract from coherence)* so that it can seen *(the insertion of 'that' would make this flow better but does not detract from coherence)* everybody get an understanding of that subject.

Participating through learning improve to growing up our minds and talk to other student which information you find when reading in order to get more information and ideas. The purpose of learning in a small group it help us to be active and give an opprtunity to think about your own point of view and sharing different opinion with other members. Discussion in group help to learn and to speak

fluently and tell you group everything that you wish to say in order that student participate and get different ideas by talking with them.

Although there are still coherence breaks and the reader has to supply information to gain clarity, as indicated in brackets, overall, this essay is an improvement on the draft. The *intervention by the teacher*, in the form of suggestions on the draft considered by the writer, can be said to have led to an improvement in coherence.

However, some readers may argue that the essay still needs more working before it is really coherent, and this indicates the *subjectivity* of coherence - some readers are prepared to work harder than others in bridging the gaps and working out exactly what the writer means.

4.8. Summary

To conclude this discussion on the findings, attention is drawn to the following:

- * There is a relationship between the presence of coherence breaks and coherence ratings as demonstrated by the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Test on the essay samples.

Topic-related coherence breaks show a stronger statistical significance than cohesion-related coherence breaks. Of the topic-related coherence breaks the most statistically significant categories, in terms of the sub-hypotheses, include the following:

- * unspecified topic
- * topic drift
- * no integration of quote.

These were found to have a moderate negative correlation with impressions of coherence.

The following coherence breaks had a low negative correlation with holistic coherence:

- * irrelevant content used
- * no sense of closure in conclusion
- * irrelevant content.

The following coherence breaks were not found to be statistically significant in this study:

- * misleading ordering of content
- * no elaboration
- * misleading paragraph division.

The relationship between impressions of coherence and marks, i.e. H.2, was found to be significant: there was a moderate positive correlation between these two variables.

The impact of tutor intervention on the final version of essay AF, i.e. H.3., was found to be most significant statistically. The lower frequency of coherence breaks noted in the final version, AF, i.e. H.4., was found to be statistically significant.

This leads us to make the following conclusions in support of this study:

- * Essays written by LLL students do indeed display coherence breaks of various types.

- * Such coherence breaks are of two main types: topic-related and cohesion-related, with topic-related coherence breaks being more prominent, and being statistically the most significant.
- * Coherence breaks do tend to impact negatively on impressions of coherence.

Lastly, there was a progression in a greater sense of coherence, as indicated by the HCR's from AD, to AF and finally to BF.

In the following chapter we will look further at the implications of these findings, with particular reference to ESL teaching. A discussion of the limitations of this research will conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapter the findings from the results of the statistical tests on the various hypotheses, as well as the descriptive analysis of the students' essays, were presented and discussed. The link between the frequency of coherence breaks in an essay and the holistic impressions of coherence was established at a significant level (cf. 4.3.). It was found that some coherence breaks impact more negatively on impressions of coherence than others: topic-related coherence breaks are more frequent than cohesion-related coherence breaks and tend to impact negatively on the coherence of an essay, from the reader's point of view (cf. 4.3.2.).

Although it was noted that coherence is but one of the important criteria for the essay assessment (cf. 4.4.), it must be pointed out that essays which are viewed as coherent by the reader tend to be rated more highly in terms of percentage marks awarded for academic achievement. This has important implications for the ESL writer. The *statistically* very significant difference in HCR assessment between the draft and final versions of essays, and the lower frequencies of coherence breaks of all types in the final versions, would indicate that *teacher intervention* before the writing of the final essay, and implementation of teacher suggestions by the writer, can have a positive effect on the impressions of coherence of the text. This chapter will further discuss the implications of these findings with regard to the teaching of ESL students at university. The limitations of this particular study will be considered and suggestions for further study will conclude this chapter.

5.2. Coherent text as an indication of academic proficiency

As indicated in 1.1., 1.2. and 1.3., coherent writing plays a vital role in the assessment of the student's progress at university. The ability to write coherent text is part of one's discourse competence (cf. 1.3.): this term refers to a knowledge of how to combine forms and meaning to produce text that is understandable to others. Writers need to know how to link words, sentences and paragraphs according to recognised conventions (Moyo 1985). The use of these conventions results in coherence in meaning and cohesion in form (cf. 1.3.). However, the typical ESL students, whose essays provided the data for this study, have had limited experience in the writing of expository text prior to entering university (cf. 1.5; 1.6; and Appendix A), with negative results, both in terms of writing coherently and receiving marks for academic achievement.

The findings of this study show that when both *cohesion-related* and *topic-related* coherence breaks are considered, there is a significant negative correlation between the frequency of these coherence breaks and impressions of coherence (cf. 4.3.). For example, the result of the Pearson Test applied to H.1., the main hypothesis, showed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.602$) between the frequency of coherence breaks (both topic-related and cohesion-related) and impressions of coherence (cf. 4.1., 4.2.).

The results of the statistical test applied to sub-hypothesis H.1.2., ($r = -0.589$), indicated that there is a significant relationship between the *frequency* of *topic-related* coherence breaks and the holistic coherence ratings of essays (cf. 4.3.). Compared to the other categories of coherence breaks, topic-related coherence breaks have the most significant impact on impressions of coherence overall (cf. 4.2., 4.3.2., 4.7.). For example, that there is a negative correlation of moderate significance between the frequency of the following coherence breaks and holistic coherence ratings:

- * unspecified topic (cf. 4.3.3.)
- * no integration of quote (cf. 4.3.5.)

- * topic drift (cf. 4.3.6.).

The following coherence breaks were found to have a low negative correlation with holistic coherence ratings:

- * irrelevant content used (cf. 4.3.7.)
- * no sense of closure in conclusion (cf. 4.3.10.)

The following coherence breaks were not found to have a statistically significant relationship with holistic coherence ratings:

- * no elaboration of statement made (4.3.4.)
- * misleading paragraph division (4.3.8.)
- * misleading ordering of content (cf. 4.3.9.).

We will now consider the implications of the findings for the ESL writer at university.

Johns (1990) reports that many first-year students have little experience beyond the paragraph level and are not prepared for the amount of academic reading and writing they are expected to do at university. Johns notes that when it came to written discourse, many students failed to appreciate that their writing skills, gained during high school, could be transferred to the new context of the university. When these cognitive academic language skills have not been sufficiently developed at secondary school, the ESL writer may not be able to participate to her/his full potential in various academic exercises, e.g. report and academic essay writing.

ESL writers, whose skills in *topic management* and the use of *cohesion*, are inadequate, could be expected to write essays which are characterised by breaks in coherence of one kind or another (cf. 1.2.). Writers whose essays display evidence of coherence breaks could be experiencing problems in the following areas such as:

- * organising the propositional or information content of their essays, with the result that there is no coherence in terms of meaning, necessary for the development of reader-based coherence
- * signalling the relationship of one part of a text unit to another, with the result that there is no cohesion in form, necessary in terms of text-based coherence.

5.3. The application of the research taxonomy as a guide to more coherent essays

The application of the research framework of this study, as a type of teaching tool, aims to help lay the foundation for coherence at both the level of the paragraph and the essay. Any suggestions made are not intended to be prescriptive and are aimed at academic essays written during the first semester. In time, as the students' discourse competence improves, it is expected that their proficiency in communicating via the medium of an academic essay will also improve.

In terms of the implications the findings have for the ESL writer, we need to consider, in more detail, the role that *topic control* plays in terms of the direction or *focus* of an essay.

5.3.1. Teaching topic control

As three coherence breaks e.g. unspecified topic, no integration of quote, and topic drift, have a more significant impact on holistic coherence ratings than cohesion-related coherence breaks (cf. 4.3.1.), we will only focus on these, in terms of teaching topic control.

In the category, *unspecified topic in introduction*, the writer has failed to orient the reader to the essay discourse theme and has not facilitated expectations as

to the content of the essay. By implication, when a writer sets out to identify the topic and to signpost the direction s/he will take in responding to the topic they are 'setting the scene' for the essay. According to Angelil-Carter and Thesen (1990:589) "the essay title informs the entire process: the generation of ideas, the reading for relevant information, the planning, drafting, assessing and rewriting". **Topic analysis** is thus crucial to the coherence of the essay. In the LLL course we advise students to provide some brief background to identify the context, perhaps a sentence or two, then to indicate their thesis statement in response to the essay topic, and, finally, to provide directions for the writer as to the structure of the discourse theme of their essay. The following quote from a student essay will illustrate this.

Quote BF3

Reading academic texts can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text (*Thesis statement*). In this essay I am going to base my argument on the following issues: reading academic texts, negotiation of meaning, the purpose behind this process of communication, duties which the writer and reader of academic texts perform and difficulties that both co-communicators often encounter, and the strategies they may employ to overcome them (*Providing direction or a map*). The character and nature of communication will thereby be explored by and large.

Another strategy is to **revise the introduction** after the essay has been written. This may result in a completely new, and thereby more focused, introduction being written.

The next category of significance was that of *no integration of quote* where the writer's quotes from prescribed readings are not integrated into the topic development. Within the context of the LLL essays, one aspect of topic

development is the use of input from prescribed readings which serve to advance the writer's argument. If a student quotes from the material and does not integrate that quote into the topic development within the paragraph, or to the overall discourse theme, the function of that quote is unclear. Wikborg (1985:367) points out that it must be clear as to the function of a particular unit in relation to the text as a whole. However, as can be seen in the extract from BF3, below, the quote from the source material has been *integrated* to support the claim the writer is making, this is an important strategy for the ESL writer to consider.

Quote BF3

In the first place, it can be argued that reading academic text is a complicated process which "calls for a good deal of circumspection and determination since the process entails entry into the writer's private territory' (Widdowson 1984:133). An example of this claim can be when the reader engages himself or herself in reading a particular section of a particular academic discipline where the reader may need to understand the meaning of each and every concept he or she may encounter ...

Although the focus of the essay is initially established in the *introduction* (cf. 5.3.), there is a need for the writer *to stay on topic* throughout the essay: this leads to coherence in terms of meaning. In the category, *topic drift*, the writer does not develop an aspect of the topic in a paragraph but changes to another aspect without signalling specifically this change in direction. This leads to a loss of focus. LLL students are encouraged to start paragraphs with *topic-controlling sentences*, in this way the tendency to drift off the topic can be minimised. These topic-controlling sentences can stem from the main points of the *plan* of the essay. We know that experienced, skilled writers approach their writing task with a conceptual plan in which they consider both the purpose of the text and the audience (Zamel 1983:187). This informs each stage of the writing process

(1.5., 1.6.). It is suggested that students who are thoroughly familiar with the demands of the topic, i.e. topic analysis has been done and this has been used as a reference point to guide the arrangement of the content of the essay, will therefore be able to exercise greater control over the development of the topic. Carrell (1987:54) argues that ESL student writers should be taught about the top-level rhetorical organisation of text, how to choose the appropriate plan for an expository essay in order to realise a specific communication goal. **Taking notes** from the prescribed readings also will help to keep the writer focused. As Lieber (1981:282) points out, essay writing is more than just noting down one's ideas, and requires development and arrangement of the discourse theme in response to the essay topic.

The responsibility of the ESL practitioner then, is to provide her/his students with opportunities to develop the skills necessary to write coherent prose which will be well-received by the reader, usually the lecturer, who assesses this work. For example,

- * how to specify the topic in the introduction so that the reader is advised as to the discourse theme
- * how to use quotes from source material to support the argument of the essay
- * how to keep to the topic, e.g. by following a plan, using topic-controlling sentences to head paragraphs, and constant revising of one's work (cf. Murray & Johanson, 1990).

5.3.2. Teaching cohesion

Cohesion in form contributes to coherence (cf.2.2.). We next consider cohesion-related coherence breaks. The result of the Pearson Test applied to sub-hypothesis H.1.1. ($r = -0.275$) indicated a significant relationship, albeit not as

significant as that between topic-related coherence breaks and holistic coherence ratings(cf. 4.3.1.). The following list below shows the cohesion-related coherence breaks investigated in this study:

- * Unclear/incorrect conjunction
- * Uncertain pronominal reference
- * Incorrect reference
- * Too great a distance between reference ties.

As the data for this study has revealed, the students of this study do not readily rely on conjunctives, for example, when they first write essays at university, other than a few high frequency expressions such as and, but, however, since and on the other hand (cf. 4.3.; 4.3.1. and essays in Appendix B.). These findings would support Lieber's contention that as ESL students tend to rely more heavily on a limited number of cohesive devices "they need exposure to the full range of options available to them in English ..." (Lieber, 1981:280).

With specific reference to the ESL writer, Brostoff's (1981:279) suggests that there are three operations that a writer must perform to build a coherent discourse:

1. Writers must sustain logical relationships.
2. Writers must put these relationships together in a consistent way.
3. Writers must reveal these relationships adequately to the reader.

Cohesion, therefore, serves to indicate *logical* relationships to the reader (cf. Sections 2.6. to 2.6.4.) according to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1972), e.g. conjunctions and sequential sentence adverbials mark the local logical structure of a text. **Topic-shift markers**, e.g. firstly and then indicate the logical progression of the essay argument (Wikborg, 1990:138-142). However, when the logical progression of the text is reversed, e.g. the presentation of "contrasting rather than similar points" (Fahnestock, 1983:405), this needs to be

signalled by the writer to the reader. One recommendation is the specific teaching of the function of discontinuatives in the development of an essay argument (Hubbard 1993). This indicates that cohesion plays a specific *function* in creating coherent text, of which ESL students writers may be unaware (Lieber, 1981:284). Specific teaching, therefore, can lead to a greater awareness on the part of the writer on the value of cohesion in terms of topic management.

5.4. The value of the Process Approach to ESL writing

All of the strategies suggested in this chapter stem from academic essays being written in terms of the process approach (cf. 1.5.1.). Angelil-Carter and Thesen (1990:588) comment that the value of the process approach is that it raises an "awareness of the stages which precede the final product". This awareness, in turn, "leads to greater reader-based coherence, when it is clear that the writer has borne in mind the knowledge & expectations of the reader as she writes" (Angelil-Carter & Thesen, 1990:588).

Tutor feedback is an integral part of the process approach. In this study tutor feedback was found to lead to a decrease in the frequency of coherence breaks of all types. In turn, this led to a greater impression of coherence as final essays tended to have higher holistic coherence ratings than draft essays (cf. 4.5., 4.6.). This would support Hubbard's (1993) contention that the need to improve L2 students' text production skills, especially at first year level, is an urgent priority at South African universities.

5.5. Limitations of this study and suggestions for further research

This research has viewed coherence as having two major properties: it is *text-based* in that the writer uses cohesion to cue his/her reader to the related aspects of the topic of the text; it is *reader-based* in that coherence arises out of the interaction of the reader with the text. It is this latter aspect which poses problems in terms of objectivity in assessing the coherence of the text. As definitions of what constitutes a coherent text stem from the individual's frame

of reference, this implies that one reader's definitions may vary considerably from another's. Phelps (1985) (cf. 2.2.; 2.3.) comments that such an understanding of coherence

suggests that readers will vary greatly in what they deem satisfying integrations, according to their expectations, goals, skills, and the individual text and context. In this sense coherence can never be an abstract structural property of a text, but is an individual judgement characterising very personal relationships between a text and its readers. But skilled readers can agree on judgements of coherence because (and when) they share not only a relatively objective and fixed verbal symbol on one side of the relationship but knowledge or similar beliefs about the world, a common language and set of discourse conventions, overlapping personal and cultural contexts, and typically human cognitive processes on the other (Phelps, 1985:21-22).

These comments serve to indicate, that *subjectivity* is inherent in positing any taxonomy which attempts to model coherence breaks in written discourse. From this point of view, coherence is seen as an individual, personal judgement on the part of the reader, whose frames of reference and expectations affect the outcome of this judgement. For example, Tedick and Mathison (1995) found that the reader's depth of knowledge also played a role in deciding whether an essay was on topic or off topic. If the reader feels less in control of the subject material they will tend to rate the essay as being on topic. This means that what I consider topic drift may not be so considered by another reader, not familiar with the prescribed readings for the essays.

But there are also other limitations. Firstly, this study only considered the essays written by two groups of students, taught by myself, during the first semester. As the statistical findings apply to a sample of only 56 essays, this is perhaps too small a number for the findings to be generalised to a wider target group.

However, it is suggested that the results are indicative, in general, of the problems ESL students, from similar background circumstances, face in structuring written discourse for an academic audience in this country.

Secondly, the study only considered the writing of those ESL students whose proficiency in English was deemed to be inadequate to help them cope with academic writing, e.g. they had only been exposed to English as a Second Language in the school classroom, frequently their teachers were themselves ESL speakers. Furthermore, most of these ESL students have had limited exposure to factual writing or more expository-type text (cf. Appendix A) which is inadequate preparation for academic study at an English First Language tertiary institution.

Thirdly, it cannot be suggested that the analytic framework used in this study can be applied to essays written in other disciplines which impose their own discourse conventions, e.g. the use of headings. Comparative studies of ESL discourse need to be done. For example, studies of the essays written by ESL writers, considered proficient enough to cope with essays in disciplines like Sociology and History, need to be compared so that a possible pattern of typical developmental stages (and strategies) in the writing of coherent text can be developed. Smith and Frawley (1983:347), for example, comment that different types of text do not cohere in the same way.

Fourthly, the definitions of coherence breaks were determined by one researcher, and greater validity for the application of use in the ESL classroom could result if the analytic framework was submitted to a 'trial' process, i.e. employed by other ESL practitioners in the classroom.

Another limitation (cf. 4.3.1.) is that the frequency of cohesive devices used overall was not established. Cases of cohesion could have been established in order to determine the types of cohesion used, and to pinpoint areas of difficulty.

A further limitation is the suitability of drawing from an analytic framework (cf. Wikborg 1985; 1990), developed to test the coherence of essays written by students whose mother tongue is not an African language, i.e. Swedish mother-tongue speakers. However, it is contended that such a framework, as utilised by this study, which is readily understood and accessible to the ESL teacher in this country, who may well be an ESL speaker himself/herself, could fill a crucial role in facilitating an awareness of potential problem areas. Thus forewarned, ESL teachers can target their teaching in specific areas, for example, topic shift markers, to facilitate the development of discourse competence in their students.

However, a significant limitation, in terms of the argument explained by Appel and Muysken (1990, in Young, 1995:66) (cf.2.10), is that the *discourse competence* of the student's L1 was not established. Cummins (1984) contends

that first- and second- language development are independent processes in the brain ... (and) ... that there is much common, underlying proficiency between the first and second languages. For example, the transfer of literacy skills in the first language can be transferred to enliteration in the second language (in Young, 1995:66).

This implies that a student writer, whose discourse competence in the mother tongue is *proficient*, may be expected to transfer these skills to writing tasks, for example, in the target language and therefore produce more coherent text. However, the issue is not a simple as that. We still need to consider the effect of *culture* on preferred patterns of discourse. For example, Ball's (1992) study on African-American adolescents, where she considered the effect of culture on ESL writing patterns, e.g. the way essay arguments are structured, revealed cultural preferences in the expository writing of her subjects. She comments that

Research on inter-ethnic discourse has confirmed that successful communication depends on participant expectations and an inferential process by which participants judge the goals of the

communicative task. Because research further indicates that these perceptions and interpretations may vary with cultural backgrounds...these factors must be seriously considered in research that investigates expository organisation patterns (Ball, 1992:523).

It is suggested, therefore, that we need to establish the preferred cultural patterns of organising text of our ESL student writers in order to determine what they consider a coherent text. A contrastive linguistics approach, concerned with the effect of the mother-tongue on the structuring of writing in English, could uncover the problems ESL students face when entering university where English plays such a prominent role.

The findings of the descriptive analysis, and the statistical testing of the hypotheses, would appear to confirm that coherence can be seen as a *property* ascribed by a reader to a text (Swales, 1990:189, in Connor & Johns, 1990), and is dependent on the writer for its realisation, i.e. the *logical structure of text*. The role played by the *mother-tongue*, in influencing text structure and therefore coherence, has not been examined - to more clearly appreciate the effect of the L1 such a comparative study needs to be done, as suggested above, to sensitise teachers to potential areas of difficulty their ESL students might experience in academic writing in particular, and factual writing in general.

It is the contention of this study that coherent topic development in an essay by the writer, or what Pilus (1996:44) refers to as "weaving the threads of discourse", is an academic language skill. Kaplan (1972, in Connor & Johns, 1990), who appears to hold a somewhat different opinion to that of Cummins (1984, in Young 1995:66) (cf.2.10), has pointed out that skills in writing in the L1 are not necessarily transferable from the L1 to the L2. This implies that the ESL writer needs to develop cognitive academic language skills in the target language if s/he is to write coherent text. We need to understand more about this process of writing coherent text in the Second Language.

5.6. Summary

The purpose of the present study was to determine, firstly, if a relationship exists between the frequency of coherence breaks and holistic impressions of coherence in essays written by ESL students, cf. H.1. Secondly, the possible relationship between holistic coherence ratings and marks awarded for essays was investigated, cf. H.2. The findings of this study show that there is a significant positive correlation between impressions of coherence and marks awarded for written work (cf. 4.4.). As most of the assessment of a student's academic progress at university is done via written work, e.g. essays, tests and examinations, it is important for students to be able to write coherent text. The effect of tutor intervention on holistic coherence ratings and the frequency of coherence breaks in final essays, as compared to draft essays, was also determined, cf. H.3. and H.4. The findings of the statistical analysis give support to the major hypotheses.

The present study does not investigate the *reason* why ESL writers do make coherence breaks of one kind or another when they first have to write academic essays. However, it is suggested that coherence breaks are the manifestation of a low proficiency in discourse competence which is linked to the notion of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Writing coherent text is a *cognitive skill* (cf. 2.3., 2.7., 2.7.1. to 2.7.4. and 2.10.), which develops over time, in conjunction with increasing L2 ability. Support for this position is taken from Cummins' (1981; 1989, in Freeman & Freeman, 1992:22-30) view of language acquisition (cf. 1.2.; 2.10).

To conclude, Johns (1986:245) has pointed out that the notion of what constitutes coherence, and by implication a coherent text, is often discussed by language practitioners "in a vague or incomplete manner". This study has set out to identify some components of coherent text, e.g. integration of a quote, so that the writing teacher has something concrete to work with in writing classes. Improved coherence, in turn, should lead to a more positive reception of the text.

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND TO CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

REPORT ON THE BACKGROUND STUDY TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

The purpose of including this report in this Appendix is to expand on the background information on the writing experiences of the students whose essays form the data for this research investigation - in short, to establish their preparedness for the demands of academic essay writing on entry to university.

The questionnaire, administered during the first semester of 1997 to the LLL students in my tutoring groups - 34 of them completed the questionnaire out of a total of 39 students.

This questionnaire is but one aspect of the research procedures in this research project which focuses on the discourse competence of the ESL student as evidenced in the essays written during the first semester of their first year at university.

The questionnaire, completed by students during a tutorial session of 40 minutes, is exploratory in nature, generally asking the student to describe the types of experiences with text before entering university. Questions asked dealt with the following:

- * writing experiences at school using English
- * writing experiences in mother tongue
- * writing experiences in content subjects using English
- * writing as a process, using English

- * reading experiences in English
- * reading in the mother tongue
- * reading for factual information
- * enjoyment of reading
- * attitudes to using English for various communication purposes.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The purpose in asking these questions was to establish the linguistic and educational background of a group of typical LLL students. The Model C school system has been in operation since 1991 and has thus been available to ESL students, such as we have in LLL, to enable them to attend English First Language schools where English is the medium of instruction. Such students could, therefore, be expected to be more familiar with the structure of English, and, therefore, could be expected to make fewer coherence breaks (cf. Wikborg, 1990) in their written discourse. However, from the figures below it can be seen that most LLL students have not attended English medium schools and so could be considered 'at risk' students in terms of their written discourse competence.

1. (i) YEARS SPENT AT SECONDARY SCHOOL

- 1 three years or less
- 3 four years
- 23 five year
- 6 six years
- 1 seven years

1. (ii) TYPE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL

- 2 private school
- 1 model C school
- 11 DET school
- 20 KwaZulu government school

2. HOME LANGUAGE

2 Tswana

1 Xhosa

1 N. Sotho

30 Zulu

WRITING EXPERIENCE AT SECONDARY SCHOOL

The purpose of this section was to establish the students' experience/s in (a) composing written texts in general, and, (b) specifically focusing on the use of English as the medium for texts written by the students.

Moyo (1985) points out that ESL students in this country have had little experience in the discourse conventions of English, and Johns (1990) notes that such students are at a disadvantage when they enter universities where they have to cope with the demands of university courses.

All the students reported that they had written essays during their last year at school. All but five students said that they had written at least one composition.

Of the 29 students who did write essays in their last year at school 25 wrote essays of some sort (e.g. compositions) or other for English as a subject.

Table 17: Frequency of essay-writing experiences during last year at school

1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Never	Once a year	Exams only	Once a term	Every month	Every two weeks	Weekly	Total	Mean
1	6	1	10	5	2	1	26	3.7

This means that the typical LLL student has written an essay in English at least twice a year. Of the other four students who did have some essay writing experience during their last year at school none of them wrote essays in English but in content subjects.

Unlike essays written for English, essays written for content subjects tend to a more factual (in a sense, expository) style, drawing from work learned in class or from textbooks etc. Students have to systematically present information in response to a topic which they have had to analyze, and, therefore students who have had this type of essay writing practice (i.e. organising text), may be expected to have some skill in handling essay topics when they come to university.

Table 18: The experience of the typical LLL student in writing expository text at school

1	2	Weighting	
No experience in writing content essays	Experience in writing content essays	Total	Mean
10	24	34	1.7

The typical LLL student, then, has had some experience of writing expository type essays.

2. INSTRUCTION IN ESSAY/COMPOSITION WRITING

The purpose of this section was to establish if students had in fact received specific instruction in the techniques of essay writing. A distinction is made here between creative writing, often subsumed under the term *composition* and more factual type writing, e.g. writing a history essay based on readings from a textbook.

Teacher feedback, it can be argued, can lead to more coherent final essays. Students who have had little or no specific instruction or feedback could then be expected to produce texts exhibiting the types of coherence breaks as examined by Wikborg (1990).

Table 19: Frequency of instruction

1	2	Weighting	
No instruction	Some instruction	Total	Mean
3	31	34	1.9

Essay topics

Of the essay topics noted, only ten could be considered as demanding more factual type writing (cf. Martin, 1989), a precursor to expository-type text, i.e. the type of essay students learn to write in LLL.

Methods of instruction

In LLL students receive specific instruction in various aspects of essay writing, for example:

- * on the functions of different parts of the essay, e.g. the introduction and conclusion
- * on the functions of various types of sentences, e.g. clarification, exemplification, elaboration, explication
- * topic analysis
- * how to organise the essay, e.g. spider diagrams
- * use of readings

- * how to quote and acknowledge quotes
- * how to write a bibliography
- * purpose and use of cohesion
- * style of academic discourse etc.

During their last year at school 27 students had specific instruction in how to write an essay for their content subject/s. However, five students said that they have had no specific instruction in the writing of content-based essays. Two students made no comment.

With reference to the use of source materials, 13 students indicated that they did use source material as input for essays.

In general, it would appear that students were encouraged to see content subject essays as being objective in nature, using a formal style with a focus on facts. English essays, on the other hand, were characterised by subjectivity and the expressing of opinions/insights, e.g. "creative writing" set on topics like "A long Journey By Train" or "A day I will never forget".

3. THE ESSAY WRITING PROCESS

In LLL students are encouraged to view essay writing as a process involving the writing of drafts, self- and peer-editing, and using feedback to amend drafts before presenting the final copy. These processes help student develop proficiency in essay writing, i.e. develop their discourse competence. For example, failure to orient the reader in the introduction can impact on the overall coherence of the essay. During peer-editing, and from tutor feedback, students can see when they have failed to orient their reader/s, and can correct this. Murray and Johanson (1990:3), reporting on research by Krashen (1984 in Murray & Johanson, 1990), note that feedback during the writing process is

more effective than when directed at the final product as it enables students to re-think their original ideas and develop essay arguments.

Student writers need to be made aware of the importance of taking the reader into account. During feedback students are alerted as to whether or not the reader can follow their argument. Thinking about the reader and considering reader response is therefore an important consideration in structuring essay text (Murray & Johanson, 1990:14,29). Students who have not had this type of feedback etc. are at a disadvantage in that they are not encouraged to take the reader into account and so can be expected to produce writing which contains coherence breaks of one type or another.

Only two students indicated that they did not receive any feedback at all. The remaining 32 students received feedback of one kind or another, e.g. written comments, verbal comments or marks alone.

With reference to the planning of their essays, 28 students said they did try to work out a plan before they wrote their essays.

Editing is concerned is the final check with the surface form of the essay, viz. grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Murray & Johanson, 1990:67). Editing, however, may reveal anomalies in the use of the cohesive system, e.g. incorrect pronominal reference.

28 students indicated that they did edit their essays.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this background study has served to illustrate my argument that the typical LLL student is ill-prepared to cope with the demands of academic writing when s/he first comes to university.

APPENDIX B

BACKGROUND TO CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Drawing of the samples for assessment of Holistic coherence

The following sections explain further how the samples, AD, AF and BF, used for the statistical testing of the hypotheses and the assessment of holistic coherence, were drawn.

Universe of AD

Mean 50%

Median 50%

Sample AD

Mean 45,83%

Median 45%

Universe for essay 2

Mean 57,41%

Median 59%

Sample BF

Mean 58,6%

Median 59%

The allocation of raters to essays for the HCR

Essays were allocated to raters to assess for their holistic coherence, i.e. impressions of coherence.

Please find below tables to indicate the raters and the essays they were responsible for rating in terms of holistic coherence, indicated by *.

Table 20: Raters for sample AD,1-18

Essay	1	2	7	8
1	*	*		
2			*	*
3			*	*
4			*	*
5			*	*
6			*	*
7			*	*
8			*	*
9	*	*		
10			*	*
11			*	*
12			*	*
13			*	*
14			*	*
15			*	*
16	*	*		
17	*	*		
18	*	*		

Table 21: Raters for sample AF, 1-18

	1	2	3	6	7	8	9
1					*	*	
2			*				*
3				*			*
4			*				*
5	*						*
6					*	*	
7			*	*			*
8	*		*	*			*
9			*	*			*
10			*	*			*
11			*	*			*
12			*				*
13			*	*			*
14			*	*			*
15	*	*					*
16	*						*
17	*						*
18	*						*

Table 22: Raters for sample BF,1-20

Essay	1	2	3	4	5	6
1				*	*	
2				*	*	*
3				*	*	
4	*		*	*		
5	*		*	*		
6				*	*	
7				*	*	
8	*		*	*		
9				*	*	*
10	*		*	*		
11				*	*	
12		*			*	*
13	*	*			*	
14	*		*	*		
15	*		*	*		
16			*	*		*
17				*	*	*
18		*			*	
19		*			*	
20	*	*		*	*	*

The assessing of the holistic coherence of the essays

The Holistic Coherence Scale served as a point of reference against which coherence breaks were determined. The characteristics, evident in each category, influenced the decision on whether or not a hiccup in the processing of text constituted a coherence break or not. A copy of this Holistic Coherence Scale is included in the next section and reference is made to this throughout the following discussion on the type and nature of coherence breaks.

The Holistic Coherence Scale Grid

Bamberg's (1984) grid as modified with input from Wikborg (1990) has been used to guide the tutors in their assessment of holistic coherence in the sample essays.

4 - fully coherent text, easily processed

Writer orients reader in introduction: directly, or, by supplying a context or situation.

Writer clearly identifies the topic.

Writer organises topic development according to a discernible plan which is sustained throughout the essay.

There is no shift/drift of topic.

Paragraphs are clearly organised and sustain the development of the topic.

The material used is relevant.

Writer skilfully uses cohesive ties (e.g. lexical cohesion, pronominal reference, conjunction etc.) to link the text parts: text has a sense of unity.

Writer concludes with a definite sense of closure.

The flow of the text is smooth, few grammatical/mechanical errors.

3 - text is partially coherent. Reader has to work a little but on the whole processing of the text is fairly smooth

If the writer does not explicitly specify the topic there are enough details supplied by the reader to enable the reader to identify the topic.

Writer has one main topic although there may be minor digressions.

Writer orients reader, either briefly suggesting a context or by directly announcing the topic.

Writer organises details according to a plan but may not sustain this throughout the essay.

Writer may resort to listing in parts of the essay rather than developing the topic via paragraphs.

Writer uses some cohesive ties (lexical cohesion, pronominal reference, conjunction etc.) to link sentences/paragraphs together.

Writer does not generally conclude with a statement that creates a sense of closure.

Discourse flows fairly smoothly and although occasional grammatical/mechanical errors may interrupt the reading process this does not lead to a breakdown in the construction of global coherence.

2 - Essay is incoherent. The reader has to work hard to create coherence and the reading process is interrupted by problems with topic development, use of cohesion, etc. Reader cannot process the text into an integrated whole

Writer does not identify topic, reader cannot identify topic from the text.

Writer shifts topic or digresses from the topic.

Writer assumes reader shares the same context and provides little or no orientation.

Writer has no discernible organisational plan and frequently relies on the listing of content material.

Sentences/paragraphs are not linked together.

Uncertain inference ties.

Misleading sentence connections.

Malfunctioning cohesive ties.

Misleading distribution of given-new information within sentences.

Writer does not create a sense of closure.

Discourse is irregular because mechanical/grammatical errors frequently interrupt the reading process.

1 - Text is incomprehensible. Reader finds it almost it difficult or impossible to create coherence

Topic cannot be identified.

Misleading ordering of material.

Irrelevance a major problem.

Writer moves from topic to topic, digresses frequently.

Writer assumes reader shares the context and provides no orientation.

Writer has no organisational plan and either lists or follows an associative order.

Writer uses very few cohesive ties.

Too great a distance between cohesive items in a cohesive chain.

Malfunctioning cohesive ties.

Referents not readily identifiable.

No sense of textual unity.

Word order is confusing.

No closure.

Discourse flow is very rough: writer omits structure words, inflectional endings and/or makes numerous grammatical/mechanical errors which continuously interrupt the reading process.

As can be seen from these criteria a skilful essay writer needs to structure the essay topic clearly and logically and to be familiar with the cohesive system of the English language.

Descriptive analysis of essays for the determination of coherence breaks

Below is an example of the descriptive analysis of specific essays. Coherence breaks are indicated in square brackets, in bold italics. Other comments have been added in italics, in round brackets. Essays have been typed out following, as far as possible, the layout of the essay, necessary particularly for the category of 'misleading paragraph division'. No spelling or grammatical corrections have been made as this researcher feels that coherence is not impaired by spelling errors, e.g. gorup" for "group", in these essays . The relevant essay is indicated by its number, e.g. AD8.

Table 23: Draft AD8

Topic-Related coherence breaks	Total
Unspecified topic in introduction	1
No integration of quote	6
Topic drift	6
Total topic-related coherence breaks	13
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	
Unclear/incorrect use of conjunction	1
Incorrect reference	1
Total cohesion-related coherence breaks	2
Total coherence breaks	15
HCR	1
% marks	40

It is vital to understand every subjects through the help of the small group discussion. "Small group has some obvious strengths. We must keep in mind while considering the strength and limitations of discussion that groups and the individuals who make them up differ from each other in an amazing variety of ways" (Gully and Leather; 1977:57). Small group teaches motivates each and everyone to be able to state his or her views with great confident. *[No map statement] (Topic needs to be specified more directly, as well as where the essay is going, especially in light of opening sentence which does not relate to the essay topic)*

Small groups is a small number of people who are combined together with the purpose of doing some tasks. According to Beulah John (1994:117) group have some form of common characteristic or other that enable them *[Incorrect reference, presumably to "group"]* to be considered as belonging together in some way. But *["But" is used to indicate another side to an argument, but here the discussion seems to be adding more advantages to the small group method, incorrect use of conjunction]* mostly the small group produce higher quality desissions than individual working separately. *[Quote is not put in marks but indicated and needs integration more into essay argument]*

"One group may be composed of five highly gifted persons and a brilliant leader, whom the other five are willing and eager to follow, if this group is given a limited questions on which they are already well informed and which they are motivated to discuss, it will be surprised when the group is highly productive", (Gully and Leather, 1997:57). *[No integration of quote into essay argument]* Gully and Leather also continue by saying that these same individuals would be impressively productive if they worked separately. Problems are solved quickly in small group because among the group members there are different experiences and ideas.

3L's learners in the small group are able to practice the skills like in the debating situation.

"You are given the opportunity to express your own points of view clearly and succinctly and give supporting evidence for your views. You have also to learn to defend your views when they challenged by others. You have to be able to identify fallacious arguments (John 1994:5)".**[No integration of quote]** "In the discussion situation, members of a group may be motivated by social stimulation to strive harder to contribute and to help the succeed of the group" (Gully and Leather, 1977:59).**[No integration of quote]**

According to Gully and Leather (1977:58) groups are more productive when the task allows a division of labour i.e. groups discussing complex problems can bring to bear the unique talents of each member. **(Here the statement made is being elaborated upon and its reference to the topic clarified)** Although you are listening attentively to the lecture but you can not get enough time to show your mental skills.**[Topic drift]**

In small group discussion all the group benefit but you cannot so much in the lecturing session, one person or nobody benefit. You also able to comprehend both the overall development of arguments and subtleties of the individual viewpoints and explanations of to others. In a lecture session, information is organised by the lecturer which reduces the intellectual demand of the student (John; 1994:6).

In the small group, members benefit as they participate actively in the discussion situations. **[Topic drift]** Group tend to be superior, however, on tasks profiting from a wide range of possible solutions where much is to be gained by the criticism and selectivity and by originality and insight (Gully and Leather, 1977:58). You can also experience an increased sense of personal power from expressing your opinions and re-acting to those of others instead of passively waiting for the teacher (John, 1994:7). **[Topic drift, from participating actively**

to "wide range of possible situations" to "personal power" to "undermine"] But if a person undermine himself during the discussion process he will get nothing/no achievement.

Also in a group other people find themselves feel shy because of the behaviour or effect of other fellow students. "You should come to appreciate that your own contribution are good and thus your sense of personal power are enhanced" (John; 1994:7) *[Integration of quote needed here with the effect that topic drifts - counted as no integration of quote]* According to Gully and Leather (1977:59) a group assigned a task involving quantitative judgements can be more accurate than individuals working separately, member of a group may be motivated by social stimulations to strive harder to contribute and to help the group succeed. *[Topic drifts from striving harder to working together]* Teaches in small group is an effective method because this encourages members to be able to work together and sharing of ideas. By doing so you have to communicate effective with others in terms of being members of a group.

A method of education which promotes critical thinking, debate but also teaches the acceptance of the value of intellectual and personal co-operation. (John, 1994:9) finalise in this way "use of small group teaches and learning help everybody who is in the group to get every hidden information that you do not understand". *[No integration of quote, necessary in this conclusion]* Finally "a group productivity varies enormously, depending on the nature of the task and situation, quality of leadership, availability and quality of information"*[No integration of quote, necessary to link this to the main topic]* (Gully and Leather, 1977:).

(731 words)

Table 24: Final draft, AF8

Topic-related coherence breaks	Total
Unspecified topic in introduction	1
No elaboration of statement/point made	2
Topic drift	8
Misleading ordering of content	1
Total topic-related coherence breaks	12
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	0
Total coherence breaks	12
HCR	2
% marks	59

AF8

It is vital to understand every subjects through the help of the small group discussion. Small group has some obvious strenght. Gulley and Leathers (1977) suggest that there are limitations to the effectiveness of small group discussion e.g. while considering strength and limitation of discussion that group differ from each other in an amazing variety of ways.*[No map statement, reader not oriented to discourse theme]*

A small group is a number of people who are combined together with the purpose of doing the taks. According to John (1994: 117) gorups have some form of common characteristic that enables them to be considered as belonging together in some way.*[Topic drift from definition of a small group to "higher quality decisions"]*The small group amy produce higher quality discisions that individuals working separately (John, 1994: 118).*[No elaboration on this last statement made, which is necessary to link it to the rest of this paragraph; misleading ordering of content - 2 cases of coherence break]* *(In this example the writer moves from discussing the combination of the group to "belonging together" because of some specific characteristic, not elaborated upon, to producing*

"higher quality decisions" - there is misleading ordering of the content, which in turn leads to topic drift, impacting negatively on the coherence of this paragraph.)

Small groups can motivate everyone to state his or her views with great confidence. Being in the small group discussions for 3L you are able to identify the unconvincing arguments that does not support a point of view. Through the help of 3Ls "learning in small group you are able to distinguish between fact and opinion." ***(This quote does refer back to the previous sentence and so is integrated into the paragraph)*** Gulley and Leathers (1977: 57) suggest that individuals would be impressively productive if they worked separately e.g. if you as the member of the group always do not like to participate at the group discussions. ***[Topic drift here from the opportunity "to state his or her views with great confidence" to being "impressively productive" and participation]***

One group may be composed of five highly gifted persons and a brilliant leader, whom the other five are willing and eager to follow, ***[Topic drift from composition of group to giving supporting evidence for one's point of view]*** It will be surprised when the group is highly productive. According to John (1994: 4) problems are solved quickly in the small group because among the group members there are different experiences and ideas. 3Ls learners in small group are able to express their own points of view clearly and give supporting evidence for their views (John 1994: 5).

In the discussion situation, members of a group may be motivated by social stimulation to try hard to contribute and to help the success of the group (Gulley and Leathers, 1977: 59). Group discussing complex problems that can bring to bear the unique talents of each member and although you are listening attentively to the lecturer but you can not get enough time to show your mental skills (John 1994: 6). ***[Topic drift, from "the discussion situation" and the discussing of "complex problems" to listening attentively to a lecturer where lack of time is a problem]***

In the small group discussion all group benefit but in the lecturing session one or nobody benefit. And you are also able to comprehend both the overall development of arguments and explanations of others. ***[No elaboration (one case) on this statement is made, and this is necessary to prevent the drift of the topic to a discussion about lectures - (one case of topic drift)]*** In the lectures information is organised by the lecturer, which reduces the intellectual demand on the student (John 1994: 6).

3Ls small group members benefit as they participate actively in the discussion situation. You can also experience an increased sense of personal power from expressing your own opinions and reacting to those of others instead of passively waiting for the lecturer (John 1994: 7F). Gully and Leathers (1977) also suggests that a person who undermines himself during the discussion process will gain nothing or achieve nothing. ***[As with the draft the topic drifts from a "sense of personal power" to undermining oneself"]***

Also in the 3L's group other people find themselves feel shy because of the behavior or effect of other fellow students. But you should come to appreciate that your own contribution are good and thus your sense of personal power is enhanced. A group productivity is based on the nature of the task and situation, quality of leadership, availability and quality of information. A group can evaluate a wide range of solutions, but this will be gained only if the task requires a large number of alternatives for arriving at a good outcome (Gulley and Leathers 1977:58 & 59 and John 1994:9). ***[Topic drifts from feeling "shy" to the appreciation of one's contributions to group productivity to "a large number of alternatives for arriving at a good outcome, counted altogether as two cases of topic drift BUT could also be regarded as a case of misleading ordering of content as all the information is relevant to the essay topic, a clearer order in the presentation may have obviated the topic drift]***

Small group learning is an effective method because it encourages members of the group to be able to work together and sharing of ideas. By doing so you have to communicate effectively with others in terms of being members of the group.

The combination of thoughts in 3Ls small group result in some new insights for everyone (Gulley and Leathers 1977: 58). Small group learning help everybody who is in the group to get every hidden information that you do not understand. Small group learning in 3Ls is the most effective way of achieving the aims of the university (John 1994:9) *(I must add here that nowhere in the essay does the writer refer directly to the aims of a university education, part of the topic, and one could say that overall the essay topic has been underdeveloped; the cases of topic drift point to a listing of information which needs elaboration to make the relationship to the overall essay topic clear. A clear organisational plan would have obviated the misleading ordering of essay content noticed in this essay, and particularly in the paragraph marked where it most seriously impacts on overall coherence).*

(660 words)

Table 25: Draft AD9

Topic-related coherence breaks	Total
Unspecified topic in introduction	2
No integration of quote	3
Topic drift	4
Misleading ordering of content	1
No sense of closure in conclusion	1
Total topic-related coherence breaks	10
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	Total
Uncertain pronominal reference	8
Incorrect reference	2
Total cohesion-related coherence breaks	10
Total coherence breaks	20
HCR	2
% marks	40

Essay AD9 demonstrates that signalling is an important device used in the service of both text-based and reader-based coherence. In this essay referential tracing is impeded because the text processor is not sure, for example, of the referents of various pronouns. The student uses the pronouns they, for example, in the above quoted concluding paragraph, but it is not clear to whom or what they refers to. The following quotes serve to illustrate the difficulties faced by the reader of the text in the areas of *referential tracing*, *expectations* and counter expectations and *larger thematic organization* (Givon 1986 as quoted in McCagg 1990:22-23).

AD9

The small group has more advantages of teaching although there are some disadvantages but the most relevant fact is that advantages is playing a major role Gulley and Leather, has given us how small group can communicate effectively. *[Topic of essay not specified; reader not oriented to discourse theme by way of a map statement - counted as 2 coherence breaks]*

In the communicative interaction they *[Uncertain pronominal reference, "they"]* have clearly stated the "the most frequent kind is the direct conversation interchange characteristics of committees, conference and public panels" Gully HE and leathers, D.G (1977 page 56). *["kind" refers to? Counted as incorrect reference] [No integration of quote]* The purpose of that *[Reference to "that" and following "that" is unclear, and regarded as incorrect reference]* is to clarify that in the small group each and every individual have the ability to speak and listern. Also proven on our text *["text", uncertain or incorrect reference]* that we need a lot to interact as small group. "There are many benefits to be gained from being an effective member of one of the many different types of groups that are open to you" John(page 117) *[Could be rated as an example of topic drift from "communicative interaction" to the "purpose" to "being an effective member" but as writer starts by referring to interaction and "conversation interchange" to*

opportunities to "speak and listen", i.e. an attempt, albeit clumsily, to stay on topic, this is more a case of misleading ordering of content]

We also be given another factor that tells us how to gain from group interaction. They *[uncertain pronominal reference]* stated clearly that "small group have employed discussion in wide-ranging activities and diverse situations because it has some obvious strengths" (Gulley, HE and Leathers, DG(1977) page 56). *[No integration of quote, compounded by reference to "it"]* We also find that in group interaction there are limitations but is strong enough and consisted of committed. *[Topic drift from "gain in group interaction" to "limitations" which does not serve to lead to the topic of the next paragraph]*

The small group also used to produce better results in most situation. The fact is that where equally able individuals working together the better result follows. The group consisted more sources of knowledge as we individuals manage to cope with. That is caused by the persons background such as experience in particular issue such as exposure of knowledge. *[The problems in this paragraph could be due to misleading ordering of content, but I decided that topic drift was responsible]*

We *[Uncertain pronominal reference]* also realised that in the group there are some members who may feel stronger commitment "a single administrator can make a policy decision but rarely can he carry it out alone" Gulley HE and LEATHERS, DG (Page 60). *[No integration of quote, necessary to explain its purpose more clearly]* The other most advantage issue stated by our reading text the "groups can employ a greater number of creative problem-solving methods as the are more approaches to and methods of solving a specific problem resulting from the various background experiences, resources and knowledge". *(Although this is also a quote, which needs further elaboration, yet it can be seen as following on from the reference to "advantage".)* Beulah John (Page 118) small group communication. *[Topic drift from "policy decision" to "advantage" and methods of problem-solving.]*

There are also certain disadvantages to show what can disturb small group discussion. They [*Uncertain pronominal reference*] stated that in the small group the lot of time to consume by the other members of the group who may be chaotic. Like they (*Presumably a reference to they same "they" in the previous sentence, counted together with previous example as a case of uncertain pronominal reference*) say "group members most pressure other to conform to the majority opinion". Beullah John (page 119). [*No integration of quote necessary to explain its relevance*] But that (*presumably a reference to what disturbs a small group, cf. first sentence*) can be easily solved by the group consisted of a committed members and punctual in time and if they (*presumably "they" is a reference to the "group members" in the quote*) had chosen a suitable leader. [*Topic drift from disadvantages to a reference on consuming of time to being "punctual"*]

Discussion can also depend on what kind of leadership skills the group members. There is functional leadership which proved to give everybody chances that is shared leadership. If strongly focus on how to lead the group effectively "every member of a group has leadership to responsibility as there is joint responsibility for success amongst the members of group" Beulah John (Page 125) (*This quote is integrated as it bears out comments on leadership.*) The idea of the shared leadership is more useful where everybody participate and contribute his/her views freely. They [*Uncertain pronominal reference*] also clarify that this kind of leadership consist of several leaders with different task to be done. There is a person who task is to seek for information to the group and give the optional solutions.

This is how we put our, evidence to prove what makes us, as individuals more rely on small group discussions. There are task to be maintain which give us as many opportunities to strengthen our ability to think information to the others. I can concluded by revealing that although there are disadvantages but the most talk is to consider the advantages as there are the most important factor in our

discussion.*[No real sense of closure in conclusion, although it has been signalled as a conclusion - no direct reference to essay topic]*

(589 words)

Table 26: Final essay AF9

Topic-related coherence breaks	Total
Unspecified topic in introduction	2
No integration of quote	2
Topic drift	2
Total topic-related coherence breaks	6
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	0
Total coherence breaks	6
HCR	1
% marks	46

AF9

At University We Are expected to develop ACADEMIC skills in such a manner that we have to become independent learner and thinker actively in the Academic Communicaiton. The small gorup has more advantages of teaching although there are some advantages but the most relevant fact is that advantages playing a major role. It give the opportunity to each and every individual to reveal his view or opinion. Gulley and Leathers 1977 have give us how small group communicant effectively. In this essay the purpose is communicaiton.*[No clear orientation of reader, and the "purpose" of the essay is not communication - counted as 2 cases of coherence break, relating to unspecified topic]*

The communicative interaction has major effect to the extent that it suits individuals' needs in the well co-operated group. In our reading it is classified in structures that we need to elaborate in "the most frequent kind is the direct Conversation interchange characteristics of committees, conferences, and public panels" *[Although quote could be more directly integrated it does deal with relevant topic]* Gulley and Leathers 1977. That is to clarify that in the small group individualistic face needs is very used in order to prevent people or student to be in loggerhead Gully and Leathers. *(Although topic drifts from "individuals' needs" to "structures" it does refer back to needs again, this time "individualistic face needs")*

The fact that in the small the conversation and Sharing of ideas makes our discussion to be very beneficial in the way that there are many activity within the context of discussion and small group become effective. Automatically if the group is beneficial it can compose many things in the mind of the group which can be led to successful and effectiveness of study. *(Topic development difficult to follow but possible)*

These are factors which can limit and destruct success in the small group. If the "group members may pressure together to conform, to the majority opinion" Gulley and Leathers (1977: 119) *[Here quote needs to be more directly integrated]*. The students may be also used the utterances which can make others to lose temper. In the group the other members can let his/her *(Writer is better able to handle pronominal reference)* behaviour to be controlled by emotions which can also disturb and stop progress. The most problem in small group the other members may want to dominate. *[Topic drift from "factors" to "utterances" to the stopping of progress to domination]*

Small group can produce better results in most situation if it has committed members who know and show all principles of the effective small group. The principles are to respect each and individual views of opinion. Give every members and opportunity if you belong to a group. Avoid to be dominated in the

group. The member must participate actively all times. *(Although difficult to follow topic is being developed, e.g. "principles")*

The other relevant factor which can disturb the disorganised small group is the time factor. The group can end up using a lot of time unaware if they are not using strong leadership system like democratic leader leadership or shared leadership. Most advantage which makes all these disadvantage to be ineffective is that "group can employ a greater number of creative problem - solving methods of solving a specific problem resulting from the various backgrounds, experiences, resources and knowledge" *[This quote needs integration]* Beulah Johan, 1994***:

The small group also embarks on try to make competence second language speaker to uplift their standard of using English proper. The usage of small group learn on what kind of leadership you took. The functional leadership is distinguish from others for its best result that include amount of time used, sum of students who impose views or opinions to elaborate which ended up led to solution. The styles of leadership which have all these requirements is shared leadership it is strongly focuses on how to lead the group effectively. This group style is giving all the individuals the responsibility of leadership the person who is leading as the initiator. *[Topic drifts from second language competence to leadership] (Here it would have been better to split this paragraph into two, and to develop the idea that interaction in small groups does help develop English Second language competence, and confidence.)*

The evidence or claim we put forward to prove what makes us as individuals more rely on small group discussion. There are task to be maintain which gives us challenge to strengthen our ability to think more critically and independent learner and thinker after getting relevant information from the others. It can be argued that in the small group the information is given by giving the chances the members of the group to say what they have. Although there are some disadvantages which can disturb small group or make it ineffective the most task

is to consider the advantages as they are the most important factor in our discussion.

(693 words)

(This essay displays various language related problems, e.g. "There are tasks" rather than "There are task". But overall, the writer is managing the structure of the argument better than in the draft).

Table 27: Draft essay A15

Topic-related coherence breaks	Total
Irrelevant content	1
No sense of closure in conclusion	1
Total topic-related coherence breaks	2
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	
Incorrect reference	1
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	1
Total coherence breaks	4
HCR	2
% mark	40

AD15

The conditions under which the success of a small group comes about are going to be in this essay going to be compared with the situation which may hamper the effectiveness of this teaching or learning methodology. *(Although the introduction is clumsy it does refer to the essay topic and tell the reader what is going to be in the main body of the essay, i.e. a map.)*

The lecture method of learning, it can be argued, provides enough and better chances for one to comment on a particular subject in a comparatively short

space of time. The vast majority of learners prefer this method. This is often because learners are accustomed to them as compared to the small group learning method; because they are less demanding; and also because learners had come realise that their counterparts' viewpoints are comparatively less important than the lecturer's.

Nevertheless, one has reached an understanding that the Learning, Language and Logic courses' goals can be succesful through small group discussion method. They *[Incorrect reference] (plural reference to "goals" or reference to "method", presumably the latter)*, in actual fact, not only meet the aims of the course but also "fulfil one of the fundamental goals of the university, namely, to encourage the development of active, critical thinkers' (John B, 1944:p1).

However, according to Gulley and Leathers (1977:60-61) on one hand, "discussions are unsuited to some tasks. Some metaphysical questions could never be settled by interaction; just as some questions cannot be answered empirically." It is, in addition, not worthwhile to take into account petty matters such as those of personal preference. On the other hand, the time per discussion over trivial questions is seldom frequent in lecture method.

But, by way of contrast, lecture method can itself be wasteful of time if the lecturer loses control of the class; if the lecturer tends to share long and unnecessary jokes; and if his or her examples or illustrations lead to the failure of learners to see the wood for the tress. moreover, a remarkable length of time can be wasted if the lecturer did not arrive and depart on time. *[Irrelevant content used] (Writer has spoken out of his experience, perhaps, and not obtained this from the prescribed readings.)*

In as far as John Beulah (1994:pp5-8) is concerned the potential educational benefits are more than enough and to spare when one learns through small group discussions: they develop the skills of debate and argument; testing and refining thinking, practising cognitive skills; enhancing learning and retention, empowering

the learner; shifting the responsibility for learning to the learner; improving learner articulacy and listening skills; acquiring the register of a discipline; and improving competence in a second language. *(In terms of Bamberg (1984) this listing of information does impact negatively on coherence; however, as tutor/reader I am familiar with the content of the prescribed readings and am able to relate this to the topic. However, if I was to allocate a coherence break here it would be one of 'no elaboration')*

She *[Too great a distance between cohesive ties] (Reference presumably is to the author in the previous paragraph)* furthermore, talks about the social value of learning through discussion in small groups. She points out at the need for tactful behaviour. Given the fact that discussion involves different people with different characters, one may feel the need for cultivation of the culture of listening and accepting criticism when necessary. "It is necessary to be tactful and to avoid direct personal conflict" (John, 1994:p8)

The socially useful behaviour patterns may have to be born in mind of each and every learning, language and logic student round the clock. In more specific terms, it can be argued that the teachings of 3L course ought to stay alive in every walk of a student's life.

In order for one not to be dogmatic, it seems advisable for one to be less tough or firm in one's stand. This, in one way or another, serves to pave the way for a compromise to be reached. A somewhat vulgar language can inevitably lead to an uncalled-for personal conflict.

"Effective learning depends on a socially effective group" (John B., 1994:p9) To illustrate on the abovementioned line of reasoning, one deems it correct to add the fact that, in going about practising the mature social skills one stands a pretty good chance to become accountable and it comes to abiding by the social conventions or social regulations so to speak.

In a word, I conclude, given the pros and cons that I have made mention of concerning the two teaching methods, one has enough room to pick and choose between them. *[No sense of closure in conclusion] (Although the writer has indicated the essay is closing it is difficult to relate the meaning of this sentence to the essay topic.)*

(643 words)

Table 28: Final essay AF15

Total topic-related coherence breaks	0
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	0
Total coherence breaks	4
HCR	3
% mark	63

AF15

Teaching and learning in small groups can be useful in Learning, Language and Logic course. In this essay the usefulness of teaching and learning in small groups rather than using lectures is the main focus of attention.

Teaching and learning in small groups can be effective for use in 3L course, in that it serves to promote the goals of the university at large. Small group discussions "Seem the methods most likely to fulfil one of the fundamental goals of a university" (John, 1994:1). One of these underlying objectives of the university is to develop a more active and critical manner of thinking on the students.

It can be argued, furthermore, that small group discussion method does not only meet the university ends, but it also fulfil 3L course goals. According to John (1994:5) there are many benefits which can be enjoyed from participating or

using small groups discussions: essential skills for debate and argument can be acquired.

The acquisition of such skills comes firstly through learning and practising of them; secondly, by making good use of the intended opportunity to air one's own standpoint clearly; thirdly, giving supporting evidence for one's point of view; fourthly, listening attentively and critically to the ideas of one's counterparts; and finally, ability to draw a distinction line between the fact and the opinion.

Practising cognitive skills can be one of the important benefits. One may have to grasp mentally both the overall of the argument and the hard to grasp facts of an individual's ideas; to select the important points; and to integrate them in order to reach a collection, all-inclusive conclusion.

Empowering the learner as well as improving his or her learning and retention can be said to be of great need to the success of the members of the group. It may be through empowering of the learner that his or her self-concept and sense of personal power are enhanced (John, 1994:8)

Another point which may be worthy of mention is "shifting responsibility for learning to the learner" (John 1994:7). needless to say, the learner may be the only person who have to take care of his or her learning. Due to the fact that other members' learning may be also in fact partially dependent on one member that member may need to contribute fully in a particular task assigned to them, and the same implies to all members.

Finally, through learning in a small group one may quickly acquire the language which is being used in a particular discipline. This may help him or her to be able to his or her views using the correct register of a discipline. It may also assist him or her to become conversant with English language.

Another, perhaps worth mentioning point is that: there can be enough availability of resources of knowledge and information . This can be evident since members may have different backgrounds, experience and knowledge. The more different their experiences are the more divergent their approaches become, and consequently the more greater might be the number of problem-solving methods. Information comprehension improvement and to fall in sight more often when the learners are using small group method than using lectures. Other understanding of one another as a group may be achieved as the members interact (John 1994:118).

With this context, better understanding of one another falls the question of production of better decisions. Better decisions in small groups rather than in lectures may be brought about by the fact that almost all members of the group might have an opportunity to speak their views.

Higher quality decisions may also be the result of division of labour among members. Division of labour may help in getting the job done. It may also be helpful in that some tasks and situations lend themselves to the group discussion whereas other problems can be solved by individual members" (Gulley and Leathers, 1977:58).

In conclusion, the factors that make use of small groups more effective rather than using lectures have been dealt with in this essay. Basing my decision on the above given evidence I can say small group discussion method is pretty worthy of use in teaching and learning rather than using lectures.

(695 words)

(Good use of linking devices in this essay.)

Table 29: Essay BF3

Coherence breaks	0
HCR	3
% mark	63

BF3

Reading academic texts can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text. In this essay, I am going to base this argument on the following issues: reading academic text; negotiation of meaning; the purpose behind this process of communication; duties which the writer and the reader of academic text perform and difficulties that both co-communicators often encounter, and the strategies they may employ to overcome them. The character of communication of this nature will thereby be explored by and large.

In the first place, it can be argued that reading academic text is a complicated process which can for a good deal of circumspection and determination since the process entails entry into the writer's "private territory", in relation to reading a non-academic text (Widdowson 1984:133). An example of the claim can be when the reader engages him or herself in reading a particular section of a particular academic discipline. where the reader may need to understand the meaning of each and every concept he or she may encounter whereas in reading a non-academic text this may not be the case. In the light of this claim one can argue that reading academic text can be seen as an act of negotiating the writer of academic text's meaning since this can be the reader's sole purpose.

Negotiation of meaning through writing and reading of academic text can be seen an act that which constitutes almost all essential features of the process of communication in a face-to-face situation for instance there is that one purpose behind to have one's message received, understood and accepted the way one

intends it to be (John 1994:24). In the light of this instance, one can argue that reading academic texts can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text since the writer of the academic text can be said to share a common goal with the speaker in a face-to-face interaction.

Having dealt with the question of purpose as one of the distinctive traits which prevail on the situation, I would like to focus on giving information as one other essential feature that appears on both face-to-face interaction and communication that goes through writing and reading academic text. In a face-to-face situation a person who assumes the speaker's role, for example, can be said to seek to give some information to the one who executes the receiver's part (Widdowson 1984:130). Since the same thing applies to a scenario whereby writing and reading academic text seem to be a means to negotiation of meaning. It can be argued that reading academic text can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text.

In an attempt to identify the essential common features, one may go further and argue that in spoken as well as written words the listener tends to sample some speaker's thoughts or feelings and so do the reader. The reason being that the speaker as well as the writer of an academic text insert his or her feelings or ideas in words - spoken words in the case of a speaker and written words in the case of a writer (Akmajian 1984:394).

Finally, giving information to bring about change do materialise in both situations as another worth mentioning characteristic. It can vary according to what the writer wants to negotiate with the reader in a particular discipline to bring about change (Widdowson 1984:131). In face-to-face interaction for instance, the speaker may want to convey some message to the listener to bring about change in a way the listener seems to see the world in which he or she lives in a particular point in time and in geographical space and so can the writer do. Then, in the light of these actualities one can argue that reading academic text can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and writer of the text.

In a bid to get into grips with the duties both communicators may need to perform for the success of their communication, I would like to deal with the duties of the writer of an academic text, that, for a start. In the first place, the writer may need to "create his own conditions for communication. Secondly he or she may have to battle to provide accessibility, and finally, acceptability of his or her message to the reader of the text (Widdowson 1984:137). With these duties performed one can argue that the writer may have had his or her job done to negotiate the meaning to the reader of the academic text.

In an endeavour to work out the reader's duties one can suggest that the reader may need to seek to recover the fundamental discourse from the textual clues provided; adjust his or her own frames of reference to accommodate new information; and to try and keep to the course that has been destined for him, or her (Widdowson 1984:138). With these duties executed one can argue that the reader may have his or her task done in his or her negotiation of meaning with the academic text.

In dealing with the duties of the reader of academic text the question of frames of reference has emerged, and it is at this juncture that it has to receive attention. Frames of reference is the "accumulated knowledge of language and how it works, together with the world" (John 1994:104). According to Kameseklu et al (1994:104-105), the reader makes meaning by using his or her frames of reference to try and match the writer's frame. In a word, it can be argued that the co-communicators make meaning by attempting to match each other's frames. Since this phenomenon inevitably takes place in a communication situation that involves the writer and the reader of academic text, it can be argued that reading academic text can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text.

Barriers to effective communication can be seen as a common occurrence in a communication situation of this nature. A barrier is "any factor which reduces the effectiveness of communication so that the purpose of communication is not

achieved as intended" (John 1994:367). Barriers affecting planning of the message by the writer and those affecting interpretation by the reader are similar: the state of being unclear about the purpose, inaccurate assessment of who the communicator is, misperceptions or that the co-communicators and failure to engage on accurate assessment of the context (John 1994:44).

In order for both the writer and the reader of an academic text to overcome these barriers they should: recognise that misunderstanding is possible and act accordingly; listen constructively; engage in checkouts for message understanding (both latter strategies can be if reader is given the opportunity) and share without secrecy, but yet sensitively, and perception produced by the message (John 1994:46). Since barriers and strategies occur in such communication it can, therefore, be argued that reading an academic text can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text. By giving self-study questions the writer of a academic text can be seen as making checkout.

Admittedly, there are instances whereupon this argument does not fit neatly in relation to face-to-face interaction. But, yet, I conclude, with some salient features - the purpose, duties, frames of reference, barriers and strategies, being indicated in this argumentative account it can be argued that reading academic text can be seen as the negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer of the text.

(1276 words)

Table 30: Draft essay AD16

Topic-related coherence breaks	1
HCR	3
% mark	55

Interestingly, this essay received was assessed three times for coherence, receiving 1 (incoherent); 4 (completely coherent); 3 (coherent).

Small group discussions could be an effective method in teaching at University level. However, according to Gulley and Leathers (1977), there are certain disadvantages and limitations that cause small group discussions to be ineffective. I structure this essay according to educational, social values, disadvantages and limitations in small group discussions.

Small groups have a variety of possibilities for members to learn skills of debates and arguments. As small groups members raise views and listen to others' views. In this process debates resulted when members support their views and used to defend them from being challenged by others. On these debates members raise evidence and argue on these points raised as a result these members get skills in debates and arguments.

In certain situations small groups could come up with better solutions to problems and better decisions. If there is a task set to be done group simply discuss and solve problems that can arise from discussion and come up with better decisions which needs to be taken. Members raise points and they decide whether those points which are unclear. ***[No elaboration] (This is necessary as the function of the last sentence is not quite clear.)***

According to John (1994:6) group discussion gives opportunity to refine and developing with thinking. This happens that we could think about something and each member thinks differently., when these members come together and sharing ideas you might find that some membrs have misunderstanding or they do not reach a certain point in these cases, they would refine their thinking if they hear some points from other members and they take these points and suppliment on what they have.

Small group discussion promote articulacy and listen skills. Some members may be shy in expressing their views, in this way on the group he or she is going to be improved articulatory. This happens because members are all aprticipating and using articulate organs. This also promotes listening skills more especiall to listen to others. This improvement is also caused by the fact that members always discussing and they gain.

Small group discussions also help members to determine their strengths and weaknesses in the group. This shows that if a member is contributing and showing effective participation that member might have many possibilities of determining his or her strength as of great importance to other and become encouraged. Also if a member is not constructing that member can be encouraged by the performance of other members within the group.

According to John (1994:7) small groups discussions promotes a register of members to a specific discipline. This means while members of a group discussing, becoming familiar with English, they can get more about that English and to get terminology and an appropriate way of using English. This helps members to use correct English more especially in communication.

Members with a group can show respect to others. This is that in order to make discussions effective members must show some kind of friendship and they must respect each others views. This also let all members of the group feel free in expressing their views and other members do not look down upon those views raised by others. Members on that case can benefit in giving respect to others.

Small group discussions also give a chance to members to practice tactful behaviour. In this case members learn how to react to other members who are showing strong feelings over something done. These members can try to apply a suitable behaviour for all members e.g. no member respond violently to other members maybe showing dissatisfaction.

In other situations group discussions can be ineffective on the situation whereby members do not show respect to each other group discussion can be ineffective. This means these members can also not respect other members views maybe becsaue they regard them as stupid and this can create conflict within the group. This may hindwer the effectiveness of the group.

Some members in the group may dominate showing how clever they are. According to Gulley and Leathers (1994:61) these members do not give others the chance to express their views as a result this provides a mono-sided ideas which cause ineffectivity in a group. It can also happen that a task is set to be done is not difficult, but a group can take more time than individuals discussing, this can result in not covering all facts to be covered.

In concluding in spite of the fact that there are disadvantages and limitations that group discussions might have, small group discussions is the effective methods in teaching and learning at university.

(745 words)

(On typing up this essay for this appendix I feel that its chief problem is that of repetition within the paragraph; although the essay seems coherent the flow of the essay does impact on coherence - but neither of these two problems serve as part of this research. It must be noted that this student does handle cohesion particularly well and this makes for general coherence, eg.as a result, "maybe because they regard them as stupid ...".

Table 31: Final essay AF16

Total coherence breaks	0
HCR	4
% mark	73

Small groups discussions could be an effective method in teaching at University level. However, according to Gulley and Leathers (1977) there are certain disadvantages together with limitations that may cause small group discussions to be ineffective. This essay will only cover the educational social values disadvantages and limitations in small group discussions. *(Good orientation of reader.)*

Small groups have a variety of possibilities for member to learn the skills of debate and argument. As small groups, members raise their own views and listen to others views. In this process debate results when members support their views and try to defend them when challenged by others. In this debate members raise evidence and argue on those points raised, as a result members develop the skills in debate and argument. *(Good use of topic-controlling sentence and advance of argument.)*

Furthermore, group discussions promote articulacy and listening skills as John (1994) has stated. It is going beyond doubt *(This reference to "it" is a bit odd but does not impact on coherence.)* that some members in a group might be shy in expressing their views, In this way on the groups members are improved articulatory. This happens because members are all participating and using articulatory organ. This also promotes listening skills, more especially to listen to others.

On the other hand, *(good use of conjunction to signal change in direction of essay argument)* small groups discussions help members determine their strengths and weaknesses in the group. This shows that if a member is contributing and showing effective participation, that member might have many possibilities of determining his or her strength as great importance to others and become encouraged. Also if a member is not contributing that member may be

encouraged by the performance of other members within the group. (*good control of topic*)

According to John (1994: 7) small group discussions promote a register of members to a specific discipline. This means while members are discussing and becoming familiar with English they learn more about the usage of English and they also learn terminology in English. This helps members to speak correct English more especially in face - to - face communication.

Members within a group should show respect to each other. As small group in order to make discussion effective, members must show some kind of friendship and they must respect each others's views. This also let all members of the group feel free in expressing their views and other members do not look down upon those views raised by toehrs. Members in that case benefit in showing respect to others.

Furthermore, according to Gulley and Leathers (1977) small groups could come up with better solutions to problems and dicissions. Members raise points and they decide whether those points are relevent or not and they could simply leave out those points which are irrelevant and that is difficult to an individual. This means that small groups are the fast or better way of doing the task or solving problems.

According to John (1994: 6) groups discussion give members opportunity to refine and developing with thinking. This happens that members think differently about something, so when these members come together in order to share views, each member might find that he or she has a misunderstanding. In that case members would refine their thinking when thy hear some points from others and they take these points in order to supplement to theirs.

However, in other situations group discussions might be ineffective. For example, in a situation whereby members do not respect and listen to each other. This is mainly caused by those members that think that they are superior in a group because they are participating effectively and they may not pay attention to those members who seems inarticulate or not contributing.

Furthermore, some members in the group may dominate the group showing how clever they are. According to Gulley and Leathers (1977: 6) these members do not give others a chance to express their views as a result this provides a mono-sided ideas which cause a group to be ineffective. Also if the task set to be done is not difficult, a group could take more time than individual, discussing and that could result in not covering all the points in time.

In conclusion, in spite of the fact that there are disadvantages and limitations that group discussions might have, small group discussions can be the effective method in teaching and learning at university because students learn different academic skills and skills of good behaviour. ***(Conclusion has been signalled and direct reference is made to the essay topic).***

(703 words)

(Generally, good use of cohesive markers, e.g. "Furthermore" to control flow of topic, statements/points raised are elaborated upon, topic flow is focused, and assisted by use of topic-controlling sentences.)

The following table (cf. table 32) demonstrates how the coherence breaks for each essay were recorded. These coherence breaks, according to the specific categories, were further recorded on schedules, as demonstrated in tables 39-44 (cf. pages 227-232).

Table 32: Draft essay AD3

Topic-related coherence breaks	Total
Unspecified topic in introduction	2
No elaboration of a statement made	1
No integration of quote	4
Irrelevant content	1
No sense of closure in conclusion	1
Total topic-related coherence breaks	9
Cohesion-related coherence breaks	
Unclear/incorrect use of conjunction	1
Total cohesion-related coherence breaks	1
Total coherence breaks	10
HCR	2
% mark	30

APPENDIX C

BACKGROUND TO CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Data used for statistical testing of hypotheses

The following tables were used for the statistical tests which tested the main research hypotheses and the major sub-hypotheses of this study. Data used as input for the statistical testing of H.1. (including sub-hypotheses) and H.2.; and for H.3. and H.4. which require comparisons of draft essay (AD) and final version (AF).

Table 33: Sample AD

AD	%	CB's	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	*
1	40	8	3	2			2
2	45	6			2	2	2
3	30	10			3	2	2
4	60	2			4	3	3
5	40	10			2	1	1
6	50	6			2	2	2
7	45	6			2	2	2
8	40	15			1	1	1
9	40	19	2	2			2
10	50	12			2	2	2
11	50	4			4	3	3
12	60	3			3	3	3
13	50	5			2	2	2
14	40	3			3	3	3
15	40	4			2	2	2
16	55	1	4	3			3
17	45	6	3	2			2
18	50	1	3	3			3
Raters			1	2	7	8	*

Table 34: Sample AF

AF	%	CB's	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	*
1	40	7	2	2						2
2	43	1			4	4				4
3	57	5			2				2	2
4	68	3			4	4				4
5	50	5			3		3			3
6	52	6	2	2				2		2
7	48	3			2	2			1	2
8	59	12			3	2	4		3	2
9	46	6			2	1			1	1
10	52	10			3	2			2	2
11	52	0			4	3			2	3
12	44	6			3	3+				3
13	58	0			2	3-			2	2
14	63	0			2	4			2	2
15	63	0			3		4	3		3
16	73	0			4		4			4
17	66	2			3		4			3
18	62	0			3		3			3
Rater			7	8	9	3	1	2	6	*

Table 35: Sample BF

BF	%	CB's	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	HCR	*
1	70	0				4	4		4
2	67	4				2	3	2	4
3	63	0				3	4		3
4	62	8	2		2	2			2
5	61	9	2		2	3			2
6	59	8				2	2		2
7	59	2				4	3		3
8	52	3	3		3	2			3
9	50	8				2	4	3	3
10	50	6	1		1	2			1
11	45	2				3	3		3
12	72	0		3			4	3	3
13	52	3	2	3+			2		2
14	80	5	3		3	2			3
15	67	2	3		3	3			3
16	50	3			1	2		2	2
17	68	0				4	3	4	4
18	57	8		3			1		2
19	45	6		3			1		2
20	43	8	3	2		3	2	2	2
Rater			1	2	3	4	5	6	*

Examples of the data used to test correlations

Table 36: The correlation between total frequency of coherence breaks and Holistic Coherence Ratings

AD/AF/BF (Total number of essays = 56)		
$r = -0.602$		
Essay	Coherence breaks	HCR
AD1	8	2
AD2	6	2
AD3	10	2
AD4	2	3
AD5	10	1
AD6	6	2
AD7	6	2
AD8	15	1
AD9	20	2
AD10	12	2
AD11	4	3
AD12	3	3
AD13	5	2
AD14	3	3
AD15	4	2
AD16	1	3
AD17	6	2
AD18	1	3
AF1	7	2
AF2	1	4
AF3	5	2
AF4	3	4
AF5	5	3
AF6	6	2
AF7	3	2
AF8	12	2

AD/AF/BF (Total number of essays = 56)

$r = -0.602$

Essay	Coherence breaks	HCR
AF9	6	1
AF10	10	2
AF11	0	3
AF12	6	3
AF13	0	2
AF14	0	2
AF15	0	3
AF16	0	4
AF17	2	3
AF18	0	3
BF1	0	4
BF2	4	2
BF3	0	3
BF4	8	2
BF5	9	2
BF6	8	2
BF7	2	3
BF8	3	3
BF9	8	3
BF10	6	1
BF11	2	3
BF12	0	3
BF13	3	2
BF14	5	3
BF15	2	3
BF16	3	2
BF17	0	4
BF18	8	2
BF19	6	2
BF20	8	2

Table 37: The correlation between frequency of topic-related coherence breaks and Holistic Coherence Ratings

AD/AF/BF(Total number of essays = 56).		
$r = -0.589$		
Essay	Coherence breaks	HCR
AD1	8	2
AD2	4	2
AD3	9	2
AD4	2	3
AD5	6	1
AD6	6	2
AD7	5	2
AD8	13	1
AD9	10	2
AD10	9	2
AD11	0	3
AD12	1	3
AD13	2	2
AD14	3	3
AD15	2	2
AD16	1	3
AD17	6	2
AD18	1	3
AF1	7	2
AF2	1	4
AF3	4	2
AF4	3	4
AF5	5	3
AF6	6	2
AF7	3	2
AF8	12	2
AF9	6	1

AD/AF/BF(Total number of essays = 56).

$r = -0.589$

AF10	8	2
AF11	0	3
AF12	6	3
AF13	0	2
AF14	0	2
AF15	0	3
AF16	0	4
AF17	2	3
AF18	0	3
BF1	0	4
BF2	4	2
BF3	0	3
BF4	8	2
BF5	9	2
BF6	7	2
BF7	2	3
BF8	3	3
BF9	8	3
BF10	6	1
BF11	2	3
BF12	0	3
BF13	2	2
BF14	5	3
BF15	2	3
BF16	3	2
BF17	0	4
BF18	8	2
BF19	6	2
BF20	8	2

Table 38: The correlation between frequency of the cohesion-related coherence breaks and Holistic Coherence Ratings

AD/AF/BF (56 essays)		
$r = -0.275$		
Essay	Coherence breaks	HCR
AD1	0	2
AD2	2	2
AD3	1	2
AD4	0	3
AD5	4	1
AD6	0	2
AD7	1	2
AD8	2	1
AD9	10	2
AD10	3	2
AD11	4	3
AD12	2	3
AD13	3	2
AD14	0	3
AD15	2	2
AD16	0	3
AD17	0	2
AD18	0	3
AF1	0	2
AF2	0	4
AF3	1	2
AF4	0	4
AF5	0	3
AF6	0	2
AF7	0	2
AF8	0	2
AF9	0	1
AF10	2	2

AD/AF/BF (56 essays)		
r= -0.275		
AF11	0	3
AF12	0	3
AF13	0	2
AF14	0	2
AF15	0	3
AF16	0	4
AF17	0	3
AF18	0	3
BF1	0	4
BF2	0	2
BF3	0	3
BF4	0	2
BF5	0	2
BF6	1	2
BF7	0	3
BF8	0	3
BF9	0	3
BF10	0	1
BF11	0	3
BF12	0	3
BF13	1	2
BF14	0	3
BF15	0	3
BF16	0	2
BF17	0	4
BF18	0	2
BF19	0	2
BF20	0	2

Tables 39-44 report on the frequency of coherence breaks for all the essays used in this study (cf. pages 227-232).

Table 39

FREQUENCY OF COHERENCE BREAKS IN DRAFT ESSAY 1, SAMPLE AD1-18

Topic-Related Coherence Breaks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
Unspecified topic in introduction	1	0	2	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	11
No elaboration of a statement made	3	1	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	12
No integration of quote	0	2	4	0	0	2	1	6	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	22
Topic drift	3	0	0	1	2	0	2	6	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	23
Irrelevant content	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	6
Misleading paragraph division	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	4
Misleading ordering of content	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
No sense of closure in conclusion	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	8
Total topic-related coherence breaks	8	4	9	2	6	6	5	13	10	9	0	1	2	3	2	1	6	1	88
Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
Unclear/incorrect use of conjunction	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Uncertain pronominal reference	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	8	0	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	21
Incorrect reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Total Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	0	2	1	0	4	0	1	2	10	3	4	2	3	0	2	0	0	0	34
Total Coherence Breaks	8	6	10	2	10	6	6	15	20	12	4	3	5	3	4	1	6	1	122

Table 40

FREQUENCY OF COHERENCE BREAKS IN ESSAY 1, SAMPLE AF1-18.

Topic-Related Coherence Breaks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
Unspecified topic in introduction	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
No elaboration of a statement made	3	1	2	1	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	15
No integration of quote	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5
Topic drift	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	8	2	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Irrelevant content	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Misleading paragraph division	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Misleading ordering of content	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
No sense of closure in conclusion	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total topic-related coherence breaks	7	1	4	3	5	6	3	12	6	8	0	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	63
Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
Correct use of conjunction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uncertain pronominal reference	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Correct reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total Coherence Breaks	7	1	5	3	5	6	3	12	6	10	0	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	66

Table 41

FREQUENCY OF COHERENCE BREAKS IN ESSAY 2, SAMPLE BF1-20

Topic-Related Coherence Breaks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	TOTAL
Unspecified topic in introduction	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	7
No elaboration of a statement made	0	0	0	3	6	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	2	4	0	22
No of integration of quote	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Topic drift	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	3	2	1	0	1	3	1	1	0	4	0	7	27
Irrelevant content	0	0	0	3	1	4	1	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	16
Misleading paragraph division	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Misleading ordering of content	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No sense of closure in conclusion	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Total topic-related coherence breaks	0	4	0	8	9	7	2	3	8	6	2	0	2	5	2	3	0	8	6	8	83
Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	TOTAL
Incorrect use of conjunction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uncertain pronominal reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Incorrect reference	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total Coherence Breaks	0	4	0	8	9	8	2	3	8	6	2	0	3	5	2	3	0	8	6	8	85

Table 42

FREQUENCY OF COHERENCE BREAKS IN DRAFT ESSAY AD19-34

Topic-Related Coherence Breaks	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	Total
Unspecified topic in introduction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
No elaboration of statement made	3	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	2	5	19
No integration of quote	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Topic drift	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Irrelevant content	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	8
Misleading paragraph division	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	14
Misleading ordering of content	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No sense of closure in conclusion	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Total topic-related coherence breaks	4	7	7	1	5	0	4	5	4	0	6	3	6	4	6	9	71
Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	Total
Incorrect use of conjunction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Uncertain pronominal reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	4
Incorrect reference	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	10
Total Coherence Breaks	4	7	9	1	5	0	4	5	7	0	9	4	6	4	6	10	81

Table 43

FREQUENCY OF COHERENCE BREAKS IN ESSAY 1, AF 19-34.

Topic-Related Coherence Breaks	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	TOTAL
Unspecified topic in introduction	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	7
No elaboration of a statement made	0	1	1	0	2	4	0	0	0	2	3	1	4	2	3	3	26
No integration of quote	0	0	1	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10
Topic drift	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Irrelevant content	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
Misleading paragraph division	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Misleading ordering of content	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
No sense of closure in conclusion	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	9
	0	8	9	2	2	12	2	2	2	3	6	1	6	2	6	6	69
Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	TOTAL
Incorrect use of conjunction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Uncertain pronominal reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	6
Incorrect reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	6
Total Coherence Breaks	0	8	9	2	2	12	2	2	2	3	6	5	8	2	6	6	75

Table 44

FREQUENCY OF COHERENCE BREAKS FOR ESSAY 2, BF21-32

Topic-Related Coherence Breaks	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	TOTAL
Unspecified topic in introduction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	3
No elaboration of a statement made	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	5	10
No integration of quote	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	8
Topic drift	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Irrelevant content	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	8
Misleading paragraph division	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Misleading ordering of content	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
No sense of conclusion in conclusion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total topic-related coherence breaks	0	4	0	0	12	0	2	5	0	6	0	6	35
Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	TOTAL
Incorrect use of conjunction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uncertain pronominal reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Incorrect reference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Too great a distance between cohesive ties	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohesion-Related Coherence Breaks	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	5
Total Coherence Breaks	0	4	0	0	12	0	3	8	0	6	0	7	40

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