COHERENCE IN THESIS PROPOSAL WRITINGS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

In academic writing such as a thesis proposal, a learner should consider several variables. Not only does a learner consider the language uses such as choice of words and syntactic forms at the sentence level, but beyond the sentence, a learner should also pay attention to the organization and unity of all the ideas and information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs. However, many students encounter great difficulties in writing their proposals especially the introduction part which deals with the organization of paragraphs. For this reason, the writer analyzed the undergraduate students' competence in thesis proposal writings. The organization of the ideas and information becomes a necessary part of writing thesis proposal because of it into cohesive and coherent paragraphs. However, many students often get difficulties, especially in the introduction part. This article is the study of the proposal writings which covers the organization, the unity and coherence of paragraphs, and the syntactic form and word choice. The subjects of this research were the students of the English Language Education Program at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia who were writing their theses as their final project. All data sources were from the undergraduate students' initial thesis writings especially the Introduction part proposed by the students. The samples of data were taken according to the proportional sampling referring to the research fields in which the students were interested: English Language Teaching 50%, Linguistics 30%, and Literature 20%. The result of the analysis shows that: (a) Mostly the students' proposals addressed well organization though using somewhat developed explanations, exemplifications, or details; (b) They also displayed unity and coherence, though the connection of ideas was occasionally obscured; Considering the organization, unity and coherence are the most appropriate variety for the undergraduate students' writing; therefore, the study suggests that more exposure to the standard guidance or rubric of thesis writing will be helpful.

Keywords: *coherence, proposal writing, organization, unity, syntactic form*

Introduction

Richards (1990) states that writing has long been claimed to be a difficult skill for student to acquire regardless of whether one is writing in the first language or second language. Many students get difficulty to master writing

skills. When students prepare to write, they need to think about the purpose of their writing. Setting the purpose for writing is just as important as setting the purpose for reading.

In any academic pursuit, a university student gets one of requirements which is known as a thesis to terminate his or her study. proposal writing assignment is normally considered as the requirement It becomes a compulsory and pre-requisite component to attain the degree in a university level. Before starting to conduct a thesis as the research project, the students have to determine the topic and then write the proposal based on the topic they are going to study. The proposal for a thesis is essentially a plan of the research. A good research proposal is the key to successful research. The clearer the proposal is planned, the more successfull the completion of the research, and then the more likely it is that it will be approved by the advisor or consultant, with a high probability that the final project will also be accepted.

Khondker (2009) states that a good research proposal has become a necessity for ensuring the quality of research. A good research proposal must be systematic, coherent and, above all, 'doable'.

A research proposal must tell the readers clearly, at least two things: what the writer wants to do and how the writer wants to do it. Any research – whether in the area of Linguistics, Literature, or English Language Teaching – must begin with a clearly focused research proposal. A research proposal must be precise and convincing. The readers have to be convinced that the writers (students) have something there, and that the writers (the students) can do it.

However, based on my own experience in accompanying the students to write their thesis, it indicates that a majority of students encounter great difficulties in writing. All these problems cause their proposal writings to be lacking in academic quality and in return have caused them to obtain poor result in the evaluations or reviews. The purpose of this study is to evaluate, to interpret, or to analyse the quality of undergraduate students' competence in writing Introduction of thesis proposals. Therefore, this research tried to reveal the problems on how the Introduction of the undergraduate students' thesis proposals was organized; how the unity and the coherence of the elements of the Introductions of the undergraduate students' theses were established; how the syntactic forms of the Introductions of the undergraduate students' theses were constructed; and what level the undergraduate students' Introduction theses accomplished.

Literature Review
Text and Discourse
Brown and Yule (2003:6) mention that a text, as a technical term, refers to the verbal record of a communicative act. In a piece of expository text, for example, the writer's indication of development of the argument contributes to the reader's experience of the text. Thus the title, chapter headings, sub-

divisions, and sub-headings all indicate to the reader how the author intends his argument to be chunked (Brown and Yule: 2003:7).

When we do the research further and ask how we make sense of what we read, how we can get well-constructed texts as opposed to those that are incoherent, how the readers understand the writers who communicate more than they write, and how the readers successfully take part in that complex activity, we are undertaking what is known as discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis concerns with how it is that language-users successfully interpret what other language-users intend to convey. As such, according to Brown and Yule (2003:1), it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or fuctions which those forms are designed.

The word "discourse" is usually defined as "language beyond the sentence" and so the analysis of discourse is typically concerned with the study of language in texts and conversation. In terms of different paradigms Schiffrin (1994) differentiates three definitions of "discourse" : (1) discourse as language above the sentence or clause, (2) discourse as language use, and (3) discourse as utterances.

In the content space, Keys (1999:120) states that the problems of knowledge and beliefs are considered; while in the discourse space, the problems of how to express the content are considered. The output from each space serves as input for the other, so that questions concerning language and syntax choice reshape the meaning of the content, while efforts to the express the content direct the ongoing composition. Therefore, academic writing is explicit about the relationships in the text. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the writer in English to make it clear to the reader how the various parts of the text are related. These connections can be made explicit by the use of different signalling words.

The process variable as the factor of the product variable

Academic writing problems may cover several factors or variables. The competence of students' thesis writings as the result or the output product is determined by the process variables. The process variables are in turn determined by several variables as it is figured in the Dunkin and Biddle's model.
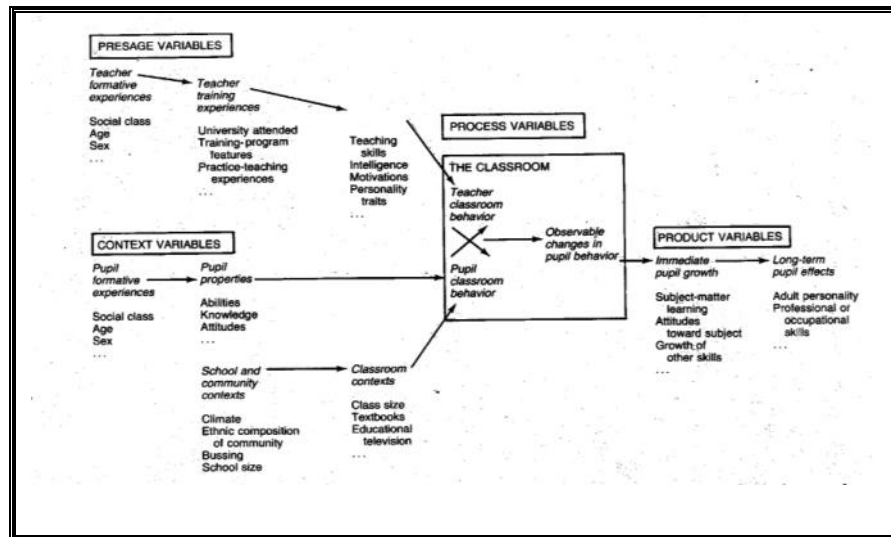
Figure 1. Model for the Study of Classroom Activities by Dunkin, M. and Biddle, B. (1974)

Dunkin and Biddle's model shows that the process variables which involve the behaviours of the students and the teacher will determine the observable changes in the students behaviour. These changes in the students behaviour reflects the attitudes towards the product variables.

Therefore, it can be concluded that firstly the process variables involve the behaviours of the students and the teacher. Then, it will determine the development of students' writing competence. Finally, this development will reflect the attitudes towards the product of the student's proposal writings

Academic Writing

Hartley (2008:4) lists some of the comments that different people have made about academic text. Some consider that academic writing is spare, dull and undistinguished. Some consider that articles in prestigious journals will be more difficult to read than articles in less-respected journals ones because of their greater use of technical vocabulary. Others warn against disguising poor-quality articles in an eloquent style.

Table 1. Some characteristics of academic writing by Hartley (2008:4)

Academic writing is:
• unnecessarily complicated
• pompous, long-winded, technical
• impersonal, authoritative, humourless
• elitist, and excludes outsiders

But it can be:
• appropriate in specific circumstances
• easier for non-native speakers to follow.

According to Jordan (2003: 9), the academic writing is concerned with the general organisation of a piece of academic writing, its structure and particularly the way in which the different parts are linked together.
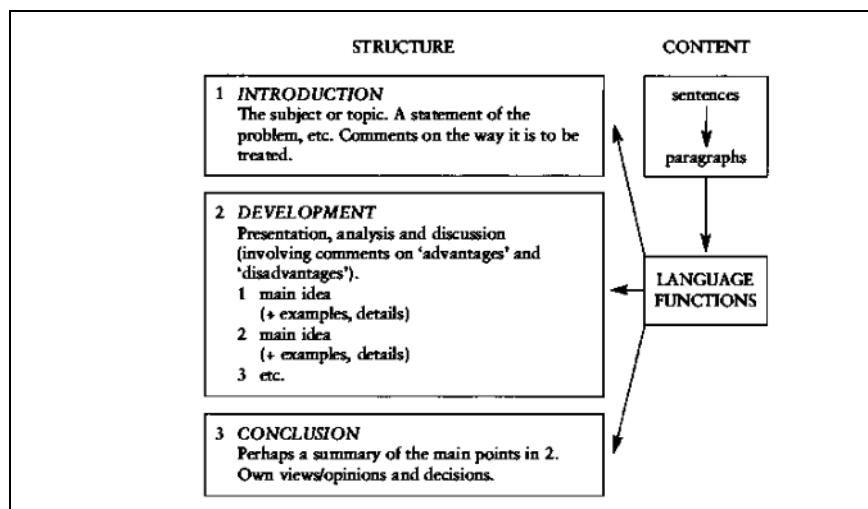

Figure 2. Stage for the structure of academic writing (Jordan: 2003)

Most pieces of formal writing are organised in a similar way - introduction; development of main ideas or arguments; conclusions. Each part of the writing will consist of language functions: particular uses and structures of the language organised according to the specific purpose that the writer has in mind in wishing to communicate ideas to other people - describing, defining, exemplifying, classifying etc.

Organization of Text
Beare (2017) states that text organization refers to how a text is organized to help readers follow and understand the information presented. There are a number of standard forms that help text organization when writing. This text organization guide will help you logically guide your readers through your text.

Ideally, refering to the rubric criteria of TOEFL test, academic writing a text should be well organized and well developed. So t**he topic** and task should be addressed effectively, some points may be fully elaborated. The text will be **well organized** when using appropriate and sufficient explanations, exemplifications, and/or details. The ideas should be **developed** in response to the topic and task. The paragraphs should be well connected to each other. We should order paragraphs so that each one follows logically on from the previous one. To make this logic more obvious, we can use transition words (or "connectors"), so that the paragraphs flow better and the reader is always kept on track. The easiest way of doing this is by using words like similarly, likewise, by the same token, yet, nevertheless, however, etc.

Unity and Coherence

1. Unity

An important element of a good paragraph is **unity.** Unity means that a paragraph discusses one and only one main idea from beginning to end. Oshima (1999: 18) states that sometimes it is possible to discuss more than one aspect of the same idea in one paragraph *if they are closely related to each other.* The second part of unity is that every supporting sentence must *directly* explain or prove the main idea.

Just as the thesis of paper should concern one main idea, the rest of the paper **should concern that one idea**. Each paragraph of paper **should concentrate on a single focus** that helps bring the reader to the conclusion. Each paragraph should have no more than one focus, which becomes like a thesis for the paragraph, often expressed in a topic sentence in the beginning. Although many topic sentences are not explicit, or are found elsewhere in the paragraph, it may prove helpful to the argument and the reader's understanding to include a clear topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph.

2. Coherence

Oshima (1999: 21) states that coherence is an element of a good paragraph. For coherence in writing, the sentences must hold together; that is, the movement from one sentence to the next must be logical and smooth. There must be no sudden jumps. Each sentence should flow smoothly into the next one. There are four ways, according to Oshima, to achieve coherence: (1) Repeating key nouns.(2) Using consistent pronouns. (3). Using transition signals to link ideas. (4. Arranging the ideas in logical order. Meanwhile, Lee (2002:33) states that many composition texts and writing handbooks describe coherence in three ways: 1) connectedness between sentences, 2) use of explicit cohesive devices at the paragraph level, and 3) use of connective devices such as pronouns, repetitive structures, and transitional markers.

According to Green (2009) coherence and cohesion mean different things but the two ideas are connected. "*Coherence*" in an essay means the overall "understandability" of what we write. When writing an essay, coherence involves such features as: summarizing the overall argument of an essay in the introductory paragraph; presenting ideas in a logical sequence; putting separate, major points into separate paragraphs; and beginning each paragraph with a 'topic sentence', following by supporting sentences. Meanwhile, "*Cohesion*" refers to the degree to which sentences (or even different parts of one sentence) are connected so that the flow of ideas is easy to follow. To achieve good cohesion, we need to know how to use "cohesive devices", which are certain words or phrases that serve the purpose of connecting two statements, usually by referring back to what you have previously written or said. Good cohesion leads to good <u>coherence</u>, which is the ultimate aim. A study conducted by Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) cited in Whai et.al (2013) shows that the lack of

cohesion and coherence in students' written texts is caused by the lack of logical connectors of sequence, consequence, contrast, addition and illustration.

Criteria for Assessing the Independent Writing

Since the academic writing should be well organized and constructed, there are some criteria as the paramater for assessing the student's academic writing. Those criteria are well-stated in the TOEFL test which cover 5 levels of scoring. To achive the highest score level (Score 5) for an academic writing, the TOEFL gives the following criteria:

Table 2. The highest TOEFL Score Level Criteria for Academic Writing

Score 5	An academic writing at this level largely accomplishes all of the following:
	• Effectively addresses **the topic** and task • Is **well organized and well developed**, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplification, and/or details • Displays **unity, progression**, and **coherence** • Displays consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating **syntactic variety**, **appropriate word choice**, and **idiomaticity**, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors

Method

The design of this study was discourse analysis, concerning the thesis writing which covered the organization, the unity and coherence of paragraphs. Subject of this research were the students of English Language Education Program at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia who were writing their theses as their final project. All data sources were from the undergraduate students' initial thesis writings especially the Background part of Introduction proposed by the students from the three fields of study: English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature. The initial theses (proposals) were the first drafts made by the students before those theses were reviewed and corrected by the advisors for the first time. The initial thesis writings were needed by assuming that they reflected the students' original writings.

The samples of data were taken according to the proportional sampling refering to the research fields the students were interested in: English Language Teaching 50%, Linguistics 30%, Literature 20%. So, the researcher took the sample data: 5 thesis proposals in ELT, 3 thesis proposals in Linguistics, and 2 thesis proposals in Literature. The collected data (proposals) were analysed through the process of **categorization** or **classification** in accordance with the **rubric criteria** of academic writing as it is stated in TOEFL Test.

The competence of students' writing should accomplish the following criteria: (1) It effectively addresses the topic and task, well organized and well developed ideas using clear and appropriate explanations, exemplification, and/or details, (2) It displays unity, progression, and coherence.

Discussion

From the result of the data analysis, the researcher found that 70% of the students' writing did not meet fully the requirements of standard writing competence. Some of the students' writings were lack of topic development meaning that they were not supported by detail or enough explanation. Some of the supported details were not relevant to the topic. Some of the students' writings were lack of unity and coherence or cohessiveness.

Table 3. Research Finding

No	Data Code	Organization	Unity and Coherence
1	ELT_01	Well organized using somewhat developed explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas is obscured *(difficult to understand)*
2	ELT_02	Well organized using somewhat developed explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas is obscured
3	ELT_03	well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence
4	ELT_04	well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence
5	ELT_05	Well organized using somewhat developed explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas is obscured *(difficult to understand)*
1	LING_01	Well organized using somewhat developed explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas is not clear
2	LING_02	Well organized using somewhat developed explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas is obscured *(difficult to understand)*
3	LING_03	well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence
1	LIT_01	Well organized using somewhat developed explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas is obscured
2	LIT_02	Well organized using somewhat developed explanations	Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas is obscured

The Organization of Introduction of Students' proposals

Overall, the students' proposal writings indicate good topic or subject suitability with the title, although some of them are not fully elaborated. As it was indicated in the findings that mostly the students' thesis proposals are well organized and well developed using sufficient explanations, eventhough some points may not be fully elaborated. The examples can be seen from the following data:

Background of the Study In language teaching, the activities are based on the curriculum. According to Hornby(2000:325), curriculum is the subjects that are included in a course of study or taught in school, college. Based on this statement, it can be said that curriculum is used as a basic principle in the teaching process including certain subject matter that should be taught by the teachers. It helps the teachers in determining the success of teaching learning process. It is expected that curriculum is applied appropriately so that the teaching learning process can run well. Curriculum is always developed in order to fulfill the need of education itself. Nowadays, our education field uses new curriculum. The curriculum is curriculum 2013. Curriculum 2013 applies scientific appoach in teaching learning process. The scientific approach uses several steps, they are; observing, questioning, associating, experimenting and networking (curriculum 2013). English is one of the foreign languages which is formally taught in Indonesia, and is very important, because the language has a purpose of absorbing and developing science, technology, arts, and culture. Besides, it also has the purpose of maintaining relationship with other nations. It is useful in international communication among nations. As an international language, English is used to communicate in the world.	First paragraph: The topic subject is **curriculum** Second paragraph: The topic subject is also **curriculum inedequate connection of ideas** But, third paragraph: The topic subject is **English**

Displaying **unity and coherence by using word-phrase connectors**	To achieve this goal, the Indonesian learners are expected to acquire four language skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Students are expected to develop and master all of the skills because those skills are important in communication. Someone listens when others are speaking, he speak to answer others' questions, he reads when others give information in written form and he writes when he wants to give information to the others in written form. The four language skills need to be mastered and those skills are interrelated to each other. Speaking is one of the four skills that needs to be developed by students. Speaking is regarded as the most important ability in language teaching because the purpose of language learning is to be able to use the language in any communication. Moreover, speaking is an activity conducted to show the ability in English. By learning speaking, both they can master a lot of vocabulary learning in and out of the class. This idea is supported by Nunan (2001) who said the cause of speaking is measured in terms of the ability in carrying out a conversation in language. People speak when they want to share ideas in a forum and speak to answer others' questions. Speaking skill is a complex skill. According to Finochiaro and Brumfit (1983: 140), the speakers must think of idea they wish to express, either initiating or responding to a previous speaker. Here, speakers have to think about two things. They have to think about idea and how to response. Speaking is an interaction skill in which pronunciation and meaning of communication are produced. Combining words and sound with the rules of English language form pronunciation. Speaking is one of the important aspects in studying English because to have a good communication people must be able to catch what is people said in order to avoid misunderstanding. Speaking is a very important aspect in English to express our thoughts, ideas, feeling, opinions, and emotion. **DATA ELT _01**	Having well organi-zed para-graphs

The data above shows that it has **well organized** paragraphs because each paragraph consists of a sentence as the main idea which followed by supporting sentences. Besides, the data displays **unity and coherence** by having only one main idea for each paragraph and using **repetition of key nouns** such as: "***the four language skills***", and "***speaking skill***".

The following data shows the example without effective organization because the main ideas of each paragraph is not elaborated well.

Bacground of The Study

As the international language, English plays an important role in communication between the various parts and groups in the world. It means that English is used by the users widely. English is used in many fields such as politics, economy, art, science, education, multimedia and technology exchange. Due to rapid development of science and technology, Junior High School students have to develop their ability in order that they are not to be left behind, so that mastering English is one of many ways of the problem solving.

In Indonesia, English is learned widely. It is one of the subject matters that are learned by students in any educational levels. English covers four language skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Junior High School students have to master them.

There are some reasons why English is important as the foreign language in Indonesia. First, English is an international language. Second, many kinds of books, labels, and literary sources that are written in English. Third, nowadays English is as the main subject at school.

DATA ELT_02

This background of the study has **inadequate organization** or **connection of ideas** between the paragraphs

This part should belong to the next paragraph

Two paragraphs display **too short** paragraphs which containing **inadequate explanations or supporting ideas**

The data above starts with three paragraphs in which there is no connection each other. The paragraphs have limited development in response to the topic. So, the data above indicates that the paragraphs are not well organized and not effectively developed because the last two paragraphs display too short paragraphs which containing inadequate explanation or supporting ideas.

In the first paragraph, it is stated that English plays an important role in communication in the world; but only one sentence supports this main idea by saying that English is used in many fields. Meanwhile, the first sentence of the second paragraph mentions that *in Indonesia, English is learned widely*; however the next sentences do not clarify that statement with adequate explanation. It also happens in the third paragraph, where the first sentence as the main idea states that *there are some reasons why English is important as the foreign language in Indonesia*; and the next sentences mention those reasons but they do give further explanation to make them clear.

Unity and Coherence of Students' proposal

The following data contains that the paragraphs with good organization, and with good unity, progression, and coherence.

Transition signals **Paragraph trasition signals**	There are two reason consideres by the writer in choosing the tour guide as the subject of this study. First, the tour guide often serve the English-speaking foreigners or native speakers, so they need English. Second, they do not have capability to cammunicate in English meanwhile that is an important to avoid or minimize understanding and to give a good service toward the English-speaking foreigners. It makes tourists from the other country not just enjoy with the Interesting places in Prambanan, but also they can enjoy the service with good quality. To solve the problem above there is a departement in Prambanan that providing the tour guide. It called HPI (Himpunan Pariwisata Indonesia). HPI also have a class to traine the new tour guide in prambanan or the student who will practice what they learn in tourism programe in their school. For example the students from vacational high school of tourism programe. The trainer will give the material for the trainee almost everyday about two weeks after that the trainees will practice their ability to the foreigner tourist who come to Prambanan. The material trainer gives not enough for the trainees because trainer just give the describing text to trainess and then they will translate it together and the trainees have to memorize it by them self. Actually the needed of tour guide in prambanan is more than remeber about story or describing about the Prambanan Temple, they also have to able to hospitality the tourist who come to Prambanan. Based reason above, the writer will designing material for tourism trainees in Prambanan tour guide, which the focuses on speaking skill, since they need to be able to speak with English-speaking foreigners. The writers hope that this design will be useful for the tour guide of Prambanan in order to improve their communication skill when they communicate with the English speaking foreigners. **DATA ELT_04**	These paragraphs are well organized and they display **unity, progression,** and **coherence**

The data above shows that the paragraphs are well organized and they display good unity, progression, and coherence by using the words of transition signals such as ***first***, ***second***, and the pronouns ***they*** and ***it.*** To show the progression and the coherence between one paragraph to next paragraphs, the begining part of the paragraphs uses the transition signals such as " *To solve the problems **above"***, "*Based on the reason **above**,....*". .

Meanwhile, the following data shows the example with good unity and coherence because it fulfils the requirements of having unity and coherence.

One of the ways to achieve **coherence** is by **repeating the key nouns :**

. *literature*

Key noun of this paragraph is

.*literary works*

Key noun of this paragraph is
. *novel*

The main topic of the first paragraph is literary works, specifically what we can get from literary works. The transition from the first paragraph to the second paragraph can be displayed smoothly because the use of the repetition of the nouns "*literature"*, the phrase "*literary works*" , and "*novel"* which had been used several times. Therefore, those paragraphs are considered as having coherence and good organization, though they have noticebly minor errors in structure.

Conclusion

The researcher comes to several conclusions based on the findings of the analysis for the Introduction theses using an academic writing criteria. Mostly the students' thesis proposals (a) developed the topic and organization using somewhat clear explanations, exemplifications, and/or details, but some of the theses were not supported the topic or ideas using clear explanations or details; (b) displayed unity, progression, and coherence; though, the connections of ideas were still occassionally not clear or obscured. Some students had the skill of employing topic repetition strategies and devices to achieve **coherence** in

their paragraphs, while the others mostly did not have. The students tend to employ **cohesive devices** by employing repetition of topical subject, employing sequential progression or unity. Some other students, however, had difficulty in achieving coherence and organizing their ideas in the sentences and paragraphs.

Since the organization, unity and coherence are the most appropriate variety for the undergraduate students' writings, therefore the study suggests that more exposure to the writing practice with standard guidance or rubric of thesis writing will be helpfull for the students.

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