

Coherence in Written Text: An Evaluation of Undergraduate Students' Essays using Grice's Cooperative Principle

With the emergence of genre analysis of text, written academic genres have become a fertile ground for linguistic interrogation. This study evaluates coherence in the essays of undergraduate students of a Ghanaian Public University, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). A total of five essays were randomly sampled for analysis. Using the four maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle Model, the study shows the following. First, additive transition markers and repetition of key nouns are the two key strategies adopted for achieving coherence in the essays. Second, in spite of two key strategies for achieving coherence, the essays are incoherent. Finally, there is a close relationship between the incoherence in the essays and the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle. The findings of this study bear pedagogical and theoretical implications.

Keywords: Text, Coherence, Cohesion, Cooperative Principle

Introduction

Since Swales' (1987) study on the introduction of research articles, there has been a booming interest in research on written academic genres among researchers in various disciplines within linguistics. Scholars still show interest in the rhetorical features of research articles such as introduction (e.g., Mizanur, Darus & Amir, 2017). There has also been interest in undergraduate dissertation (Afful & Nartey, 2014; Swandi, 2016; Dania, 2018; Futasz, 2006; Cut, 2014) and research proposal (Dasril & Ningsih, 2019).

Apart from RA and Dissertation, one other written academic genre which continues to receive scholarly attention is students' essays. As part of written academic genres, students' essays usually comprise out-of-class writing assignments with specified length of pages (between one and five pages). Unlike RA and Dissertation, these essays do not require students to construct personal meaning, but to find, organize and present information in accordance with explicit instruction. Students are therefore required to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar, discourse markers and establish coherence in their texts.

In academic setting, students' essays occupy a sensitive position as academic survival of students depends on their ability to produce quality text in the context of academic discourse expectations (Hinkel, 2004). In other words, the ability to write coherent essay determines students' academic success or failure. In view of the above, students' essays have become fertile grounds for linguistic research.

Previous Studies on Students' Essays

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2 Research on students' essays especially in EFL and ESL settings abounds.
3 Given the global spread of the English language and the demand for quality
4 writing in academic communities, the scholarly interest in students' essays is
5 not surprising. Despite the numerous studies, some have been concerned with
6 cohesive devices (e.g., Amenorvi, 2011; Cut, 2014; Aguiieb, 2017;
7 Amoakohene, 2017; Ahmad, 2019). For instance, Ahmad's study revealed
8 misuse and overuse of both grammatical and lexical cohesive devices in
9 students' essays. Thus these studies were preoccupied with students' writing
10 competence as far as establishing cohesion in texts is concerned.

11 Besides, the focus of most studies has been on factors that contribute to
12 incoherence in students' essays. For instance, Gonye et al. (2012) found
13 inconsistent and wrong pronoun reference, and mixture of different ideas in
14 one paragraph in students' essays in Zimbabwe. Similarly, Abdul-Hamid,
15 (2010) and Cekiso's (2016) study revealed the inability of students to write
16 introduction, thesis statement, topic sentences, concluding sentences and
17 conclusion Egypt and South Africa respectively. In recent times, Masadeh's
18 (2019) study has revealed the inability of students to use conjunction and
19 transition words to link sentences and paragraphs together, repetition of same
20 ideas and failure to split paragraphs in terms of content of relevance in
21 students' essays in Saudi Arabia. All the above studies have shed light on the
22 various writing challenges that confront students in different academic settings.

23 In contrast, some scholars contend that research into students' essays
24 should not be limited to the description of writing problems, but should focus
25 on discovering the root cause of the problem. In her study, An Application of
26 Grice's Cooperative Principle to the analysis of coherence in Basic Writing,
27 Abidin (1996) established that incoherence is as a result of violations of the
28 maxims of the cooperative principle. She argues that the violations are
29 primarily due to the inability of students to discover their own ideas, failing to
30 keep to their focus, not making writing relevant to the topic ideas, and not
31 organizing details adequately.

32 Following Abidin, Bayram (2006) applied the maxims of the CP to
33 examine how much the coherence-related difficulties/problems of Turkish EFL
34 students in writing English essays are related to writing Turkish essays. The
35 study revealed that maxim of relation is the most violated maxim that
36 culminated in incoherence in both Turkish and English essays. Another study
37 which has recently applied the CP approach oral English learning is Li (2015).
38 He concluded that studying the CP and its maxims will enable learners to
39 improve their linguistic competence and stimulate learning.

40 In sum, the review of literature has established that students' essays have
41 been adequately studied in different parts of the world. In addition, the review
42 above shows that a chunk of existing studies on coherence in students' essays
43 have been conducted in the EFL settings while in the ESL settings particularly
44 in Ghana, little scholarly attention has been given to coherence in students'
45 essays. The two cited Ghanaian studies (Amenorvi, 2011; Amoakohene, 2017)
46 explored cohesive devices and grammatical errors. Finally, the above review

has shown that while the essays of English language students' have been studied, essays of non-English students remain under researched. In filling the niche identified in the literature, the present study evaluates coherence in Ghanaian first-year students' essays using Grice's Cooperative Principle.

Aim of the Study

The present study aims at establishing the relationship between coherence problems and the Maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle. I argue that coherence problems in students' essays are as a results of the violation of Grice's conversational maxims. Though Grice's model focuses on oral conversation or spoken discourse, it can be applied to writing since writing is also a mode of communication. The structure of the present study is as follows:

I first present the research questions on which the present study is based. The next section deals with the conceptual framework within which the study is situated: Cohesion- Coherence Model and Cooperative Principle, and follow it up with methodology for the study where I discuss data used for analysis. Subsequently, I present the results and discussion in accordance with the research questions. The final section introduces conclusion and recommendation for further studies.

Research Questions

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the students establish coherence in their essays?
2. What are the problems of coherence in the students' essays?
3. What is the relationship between coherence problems and the maxims of cooperative principle?

Conceptual Framework

The present study is based on Halliday and Hassan's (1976) Cohesion Model and Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. All these models provide guidance to the study.

Text

Halliday & Hassan (1976) define text as “any passage, spoken or written of whatever length, that does form a unified whole. It is a semantic unit not of form but of meaning” (P. 293). In other words, the linguistic properties (sentences, paragraphs) of a text are connected to give meaning. A text is meaningful when the language items tie meanings together within the text at the micro level as well as tie meaning in the text to the social context in which the text occurs at the macro level. Thus a text has both cohesion and coherence, and that cohesion contributes to coherence (texture).

Cohesion

According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), cohesion is a semantic tie that refers to relations of meanings that exist within the text and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the text is dependent on that of another. Thus, one linguistic item presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. In other words, cohesion refers to the organization of the linguistic items or elements of the text or ways of establishing connection between sentences and paragraphs to form a unified whole. Cohesion is conceptualized as signaled by five general grammatical cohesive devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Each enable writers to link ideas in a text.

Referencing

Referencing functions to retrieve presupposed information in text and must be identifiable for it to be considered as cohesive. There are three general types: homophoric, exophoric and endophoric referencing. Endophoric refers to information that can be retrieved within the text, and is divided into three: anaphoric, cataphoric and esphoric. Anaphoric refers to any reference that “points backwards” to previously mentioned information in text; that is, it is the most relevant as it provides a link with a preceding portion of the text”. Cohesive elements used for referencing include personal pronouns (like “he, him, she, her, mine, yours, his, hers, theirs, our etc.), demonstrative (this, these, that, those, here, there, then and the”), The comparative reference (same, equal, similar, different, else, more, and adverbs like “so, such, similarly, otherwise, more”).

Substitution/Ellipsis

Substitution and ellipsis perform the same function; used to avoid the repetition of a lexical item (Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Crane, 2000; Ogla, 2017). They are classified into nominal (one and ones) used to substitute nouns and verbal substitute which is realized in use of the verb “do” and sometimes used

in conjunction with so as in do so. Finally, in clausal substitution, an entire clause is substituted and through it may seem to be similar to either nominal or verbal substitution; the difference is the presupposed anaphoric reference.

Conjunction

Conjunctions perform four semantic functions: additive, adversative, causal and temporal. Additive is signaled by and, also, two, furthermore, and additionally. It also acts to negate a presupposed item; signaled by nor, and, do not, either and neither. On the other hand, adversative conjunctions indicate difference, and are signaled by yet, though, only, but, in fact, rather whereas causal expresses result, reason and purpose”, and is signaled by “so, then, for, because, for this reason, as a result, and in this respect”. Finally, temporal signals sequence or time, and is signaled by then, next, after that, next day, until then, at the same time, at this point” etc.

Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion refers to the “cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary (P. 274). It is put into two: reiteration and collection. Reiteration pertains to the repetition of a lexical item, either directly or through the use of synonym, a super ordinate or a generally related word. Collocation, on the other hand, pertains to lexical items that are likely to be found together within the same text (p. 286).

Coherence

Bain (1990) cited in Mohsen & Samadan (2019) uses two approaches to distinguish between cohesion and coherence: text-based and reader-based. The text-based coherence refers to semantic unity of a text that is realized cohesive ties; ideas are connected to one another with appropriate cohesive devices, and this is referred to as cohesion according to Halliday and Hassan (1976). On the other hand, reader-based coherence refers to the interaction between the reader and the text based on the reader’s background knowledge and world knowledge. In simple terms, coherence is the logical organization of all the properties of text such as the introduction, thesis statement, supporting details and conclusion. In distinguishing between cohesion and coherence, Ogla (2017) refers to cohesion as a property of text, while coherence pertains to discourse.

Some scholars (e.g., Hinkel, 2004; Ogla, 2017) contend that a cohesive text may not necessarily be coherent whereas a coherent text may not contain any cohesive element. In sum, a text is coherent when all its parts are connected and the reader is able to draw on his or her mental representation or background knowledge to construct meaning of it. In fact, cohesion contributes to coherence; that is, the essence of establishing cohesion in text is for the text

to be coherent. Therefore, in this study, cohesion is considered as part of the strategies for achieving coherence in essays.

The Cooperative Principle

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle Model is basically about how people use language in conversation. The model is predicated on the assumption that, participants involved in conversation try to be or adhere to cooperative principle; that is, they make their contribution appropriate to the conversational context (Birner, 2013). In other words, participants in conversation are cooperative with each other, and in accepting a speaker's utterance, the listener assumes that the speaker's proposition is true and is not misleading the listener. Thus the sense of cooperation is the one in which participants in conversation are not assumed to be trying to mislead or withhold relevant information from each other. Participants (Yule, 1996). In view of the above assumption, Grice states:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

Grice identifies as guidelines four basic general principles underlying the efficient cooperative use of language, which together express a general cooperative principle, and calls them conversational maxims: quality maxim, quantity maxim, relation and manner (Levinson, 1983). The quality maxim requires participants in speakers or writers to make contribution that is true, and it has two submaxims: first, do not say what you believe to be false; secondly, do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

On the other hand, Quantity maxim expects speakers to make contribution as informative as is required but not more informative than required. It has one submaxim: do not make your contribution more informative than is required. The next maxim is the relation maxim which expects the conversational contribution to be relevant. Finally, unlike the other three, the maxim of manner is related not to what the speaker says but rather how he says it. It has four submaxims or rules: avoid obscurity, avoid ambiguity, be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity) and be orderly.

In reacting to the Grice's model, Leech (1983) observes that the requirement to tell the truth is a moral issue; therefore, in saying that people normally follow the cooperative principle, then, one is taking a moral stance. However, Leech admits that the maxims have contributed immensely to the description of linguistic meaning as they explain how it is that speakers often mean more than they say. He further added that the maxims have introduced communicative values such as truthfulness into the study of language. According to Lakoff in Ostman (2009) (ed.), "a communication framed exactly according to the maxims would be perfectly logical, but almost any discourse

carried out entirely according to the maxims would be most unusual and perhaps even unintelligible”.

In spite of the criticism, the conversational maxims have been used extensively for analysis across various linguistic disciplines as the review of literature showed. The present study applies them to detect problems of coherence in Ghanaian students’ essays. I will analyze the students’ essays in accordance with each maxim to ascertain which of them is observed or violated.

Method

Data Analysis Procedure

Data for the study comprises essays written and submitted on 30th September, 2019 by first-year students in Writing and Presentation Skills class. A total of five essays were randomly sampled for analysis due to constraint on quantity or number of pages of the study. Data was analyzed in accordance with the research questions. The study was purely a qualitative one; therefore, no descriptive statistics and tables were included. The study was conducted for the purpose of gaining an understanding of the interpretation of coherence strategies in students’ essays. The content of the sampled essays was unedited. Each essay was analyzed based on Grice’s four maxims. guided by the maxims, each essay was coded using the first letter of each maxim (Q- Quality, QN-Quantity, R-Relation and M-Manner) so as to know which maxim is observed or violated.

Analytical Framework

Conversational Maxims

Grice’s Cooperative principle (CP) consists of four maxims (guidelines): maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relation and maxim of manner. These maxims are explained as follows:

Quality maxim requires participants in speakers or writers to make contribution that is true, and it has two submaxims: first, do not say what you believe to be false; secondly, do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Quantity maxim, on the other hand, expects speakers to make contribution as informative as is required but not more informative than required. It has one submaxim: do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The next maxim is the relation maxim which expects the conversational contribution to be relevant. Finally, unlike the other three, the maxim of manner is related not to what the speaker says but rather how he says it. It has

four submaxims or rules: avoid obscurity, avoid ambiguity, be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity) and be orderly.

Analysis and Discussion

This section deals with analysis and discussion of data in accordance with the three research questions. All the five selected essays were written on the same topic: one principle of verbal communication. First, I present each essay and evaluate it in accordance with the four maxims.

Essay Topic

Write a short essay on one of the principles of verbal communication.

First essay

“Language is the collection of symbols, letters, or words with arbitrary meaning that governed by rules and used to communicate. Language consists of words or symbols that represent things without being those things. Language has three set of rules which are identified semantic rules, syntactic rules, pragmatic rules”.

“Semantic rule is the study of the way humans use language to evoke meaning in others. Semantic focuses on individual words and their meaning”.

Syntactic rules focuses on the definition of specific words, syntax is the way in which words are arranged to form phrases and sentences. For eg, in the English language, the subject is usually placed before the verb and the object after the verb.

Pragmatic rules is the study of language as it is used in a social context including its effect on the communicators. Messages are variable (change) depending on the situation. Ambiguous messages such as “how are you? what’s new? You’re looking good” have different meanings, depending on the context or situation”.

In the nut shell, these are all the rules of language”.

Analysis

Quantity Maxim

In the introduction, the maxim of quantity was violated in the entire essay resulting in incoherence. Analysis shows that the writer failed to capture or provide information about verbal communication. In other words, the writer failed to situate the thesis of the essay (language rules) within the larger context. An introduction begins with a general statement about a topic and ends

with a specific statement (the focus of the essay). In the same vein, topic ideas in the content were not adequately developed. Worse of all, the conclusion was only one sentence.

Maxim of Manner

The violation of the maxim of manner also occurred in the introduction and content of the essay. For instance, the first supporting detail in the introduction (words or symbols that represent things without being those things) lacks clarity. A violation of the maxim of manner is also evident in the content. We realized that the content paragraphs are not connected, resulting in illogical presentation of ideas.

Maxim of quality

In the case of the maxim of quality, the violation occurred in the content of the essay. The second sentence in the first paragraph *Semantic focuses on individual words and their meaning* and the first sentence in the second paragraph *syntactic rules focuses on the definition of specific words* are all inaccurate. Further, these supporting details (*Messages are variable (change) depending on the situation. Ambiguous messages such as "how are you? what's new? You're looking good" have different meanings, depending on the context or situation*) in the third content paragraph are inaccurate. The above supporting details are also irrelevant.

Second essay

"Language is communication by means of speaking, writing or signing with our hands and is based on a system of symbols. Language is greatly varied throughout the world but all languages share a common set of rules to keep them in order. The five rule systems of language are explained below;"

The first is **PHONOLOGY**; despite the varied origins and intricacies of languages across the globe, they are all comprised of basic sounds this system includes the sound used in that language and how they can be combined. Phonology can be broken down further into units known as phonemes - the basic unit of sound in a language. An example of a phoneme is the sound /k/ as in the c in "cat".

The second rule is **MORPHOLOGY**; the system of how words are formed or not formed in a language. Morphemes also indicate to us context and tense. Some morphemes we use often include prefixes, suffixes, and compound words. individual languages determine what morphemes can be combined to create words and meanings, and have the ability to decide that some combinations do not make sense.

The third rule is semantics; this is the actual meaning of the words and sentences we are communicating. Each word in each of the languages has

meaning associated with it, and that meaning determines how the word is used when communicated. Words can also have more than one semantic meaning, as with the words man and boy. Both words denote the same gender of a person, and probably a few appearances. However, there are also semantic differences between the two words, including age.

The fourth rule is **SYNTAX**; if we know what grammar is, then we are comfortably familiar with syntax. The rules of grammar in determining word order, word placement, and word combination are echoed in the language rule of syntax. For example, we would not state that, “the textbook read I did”. Syntax tells us that the textbook was not the object reading, and that straightening out our word order will give us the proper meaning instead. Proper syntax does vary from language to language however, and learners of other languages often have their work cut out for them learning a new rule of syntax.

Language plays an important role when you wish to express your thoughts and feelings to the person you are talking to. Basically, people adhere to certain patterns for what’s permissible in language and reject structures that seem wrong.”

Analysis

Quantity maxim

Unlike the previous essay, in the above essay, the violation of the maxim of quantity occurred in the introduction. Analysis established that the writer failed to provide appropriate wider context for the topic of discussion.

Relation maxim

It was found that the writer violated the maxim of relation in the introduction. For instance, the topic sentence in the introduction *language is communication by means of speaking, writing or signing with our hands* was found to be unclear, and needed further clarification. further, violation of the above maxim also occurred in the content. Although the writer used additive transition markers (first, second, third, fourth) to connect ideas, the essay was incoherent as most of the supporting ideas were found to be irrelevant to the topic ideas. For instance, the first supporting detail *morphemes also indicate to us context and tense* has no connection with the topic idea *morphology*. Again, the use of inappropriate punctuation (semi-colon instead of period or full stop) contributed immensely to the incoherence.

1 *Quality maxim*

2
3 Apart from maxim of relation, the first supporting detail *morphemes also*
4 *indicate to us context and tense* also violated the maxim of quality as it is
5 inaccurate or untrue.

7 **Third essay**

9 “Language is the method of human communication, either spoken or
10 written, consisting of the use of words in an organized and conventional
11 way. There five rules of language which are phonology, morphology,
12 syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

13 Phonology are the least units of language and account for an essential part
14 school age language understanding and production. Phonology helps us to
15 differentiate between a sound, a letter and a word that helps us the ability
16 to read and spell.

17 Morphology is the study of words, how they formed and how they relate to
18 other words in the same language. It studies the structure of words and
19 parts of words such as stems, root words, begins and ends.

20 Syntax is the rules, principles and processes that govern the structure of
21 sentences in each language, usually include word order. The term syntax is
22 also referred to the study of such principles and processes.

23 Semantics is the linguistics and logical study of meaning in the language,
24 programming languages, formal reasons and semiotics. It is concerned
25 with the relationship between signifiers like words, phrases, signs and
26 symbols.

27 The rules of language are the most important part of our being because it
28 makes communication suitable and understandable. These rules help us to
29 differentiate between a sound, a word, a letter and a sentence. It also
30 makes teaching and learning effective and easier.”

33 **Analysis**

35 *Quantity maxim*

37 As we observed in the previous essays, the issue of narrow introduction is
38 also evident in the above essay. Given the topic of the essay, we expected the
39 students to capture verbal communication in the introduction. Failure to do so
40 amount to the breach of maxim of quantity.

42 *Manner maxim*

44 Unlike the second essay, in this third essay, we realize that ideas were
45 illogically presented; there is no connection or ties between the paragraphs. For
46 instance, the last paragraph appears to be the conclusion; yet there is no signal

for readers to infer. Maxim of manner was also violated in the content. For instance, the topic sentence in the first content paragraph (*Phonology are the least units of language and account for an essential part school age language understanding and production*) and the entire fourth paragraph lack clarity.

Quality maxim

Violation of quality maxim is evident in the content. For instance, the topic idea in the first content paragraph (*Phonology are the least units of language and account for an essential part school age language understanding and production*) is inaccurate. Also, the second sentence in the conclusion (*these rules help us to differentiate between a sound, a word, a letter and a sentence*) is inaccurate.

Relation maxim

Violation of maxim of relation occurred in the conclusion. The second sentence in the conclusion (*these rules help us to differentiate between a sound, a word, a letter and a sentence*) is irrelevant.

Fourth essay

“The rules of language (grammar) in determining word order, word placement and echoed in the language rule of syntax, however there are also semantic differences between the two words, including age. Semantics pragmatics. The fifth and final rule system of language is the use of pragmatics.

Language, language is communication by means of speaking, writing or singing with our hands and is based on a system of symbols. However, rules of languages are in five systems which are

Phonology: is the system of contrastive relationships among the speech sound that constitute the fundamental components of a language.

Morphology: is the study of words, how they are formed, and their relationship to other words in the same language.

Syntax: is linguistics, syntax is the act of rules, principles, and processes that govern the structure of sentences of sentences in a given language, usually including word order. The term syntax is also use to refer to the study of such principles and processes.

Semantics: is the study of the interpretation of signs or symbols used in agent or communities within particular circumstances and contexts.”

Analysis

Quantity of maxim

As usual, the writer failed to provide adequate information in the introduction and the content. The topic ideas in the content paragraphs were not adequately supported. It was not clear whether the first paragraph is the introduction of the essay or content paragraph.

Maxim of manner

Apart from that, in the content, all the supporting sentences were full of grammatical errors, making it difficult for readers to infer meaning. Further, ideas in the essays were illogically presented with no connection between the paragraphs. For instance, the second content paragraph (*Phonology: is the system of contrastive relationships among the speech sound that constitute the fundamental components of a language*) lacks clarity.

Fifth essay

“Language has always been an important source of communication. It may be any form of language. The one that is spoken through words or the sign language that uses hand or figure gestures. Language plays an important role when you wish to express your thoughts and feelings to the person or people you are talking to.

Language therefore refers to the communication skills used in workplaces and focuses on the language and skills needed for typical business communication such as presentations, negotiations, meetings, small talk, socializing, correspondence, report writing, and a systematic approach. Thus rules of language is one of the principle of communication.

There are three rules of language. the first which is:

Semantic rule: in this rule it deals with actual reference. For example, the symbol dog refers to that one dog and no other.

Syntactic rule: this rule deals with a high morpheme per word ratio. It composes multiple concepts into each word.

Contextual rule: in this rule, it surrounds the event and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation. It is thus a relativistic concept, only definable with respect to some focal event, not independently.

With the above rules of communication, everything states clearly that rules of language is a principle of communication.”

Analysis

Quantity maxim

The violation of quantity in the above essay occurred in the content; that is, the writer failed to support claims with sufficient evidence or information in the content which is as a result of the violation of maxim of quantity. It is noticeable that, in the above essay, the introduction rather appeared more detailed than (though irrelevant to the topic issues) the content.

Maxim of manner

Though the writer provided adequate information in the introduction, there was no order in the introduction. The lack of order eroded the writer's effort to establish coherence through the use of repetition of key noun (language), pronoun (it) and transition marker (therefore), but the effort is eroded by the writer's inability to present ideas logically. Again, the clause "There are three rules of language. the first which is" appears to be the writer's thesis statement, and it is an indication of the difficulty students have in stating the thesis (focus) of their essay.

In sum, the study has shown that, though students employ transition markers, repetition of key nouns and pronoun as coherence strategies, their essays remain incoherent due to factors such as subject-verb agreement errors, spellings, use of inappropriate punctuation, illogical presentation of ideas, and irrelevant supporting details. Apart from this, it is established that students have difficulty in writing introduction, thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting sentences and conclusion. All these coherence challenges, the study has established, are as a result of the violation of Grice's four maxims.

The study's findings above reflect Dasril & Ningsih's (2019) study which reported on the use of inappropriate cohesive devices, illogical presentation of ideas, unclear topic sentences and irrelevant sentences in undergraduate research proposal. Cekiso's (2016) claim that undergraduate students experience challenges related to writing introduction, a thesis statement, topic sentences and conclusion is amply confirmed by the present study. In fact, the study has shown a close relationship between Maxims of Grice's cooperative principle as these coherence problems are the products of the violation of the maxims of the (Abidin, 1996). For instance, the results have shown that the maxim of quantity suffers more violation than the others.

Conclusion

In this study, I sought to explore the coherence strategies and problems in essays written by first-year students of a Ghanaian Public University, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). The study also sought to find out whether there is a relationship between the incoherence in the students' essays and Grice's conversational maxims; that is, whether the incoherence is as a result of the violation of Grice's conversational maxims.

In tandem with the above, three conclusions are drawn. First, in first-year students' essays, three key strategies are used for achieving coherence:

repetition of key nouns or topics, additive transition markers and pronoun (it). Second, in spite of the use of the above coherence strategies, the students' essays are incoherent due to choice of inappropriate transition markers, punctuation, difficulty in writing introduction, thesis statement, topic sentences, illogical presentation of ideas, inadequate and irrelevant supporting details, and grammatical errors (subject-verb concord, choice of inappropriate prepositions).

Finally, the results of the study revealed that there is a close relationship between the incoherence in students' essays and Grice's conversational maxims; that is, incoherence in the essays are caused primarily by the violation of Grice's conversational maxims. More importantly, the maxim of quantity was violated more than the others as the students failed to provide adequate information or evidence to support their claims.

Implications

The results of the study bear two implications. First, the study has implication for pedagogical approach to writing at the undergraduate level. Thus the study is of pedagogical significance to writing and presentation skills teachers in their attempt to help students enhance their writing competence. The fact that present study has revealed problems of coherence in students' essays, it is of pedagogical significance to teachers of Writing and Presentation Skills course.

In addition, the study has a theoretical implication for Bain (1990) concept of coherence and Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. The view that coherence refers to the interaction between the reader and the text based on the reader's background knowledge and world knowledge has been affirmed by the present study. Also, the present study confirms the relevance and effectiveness of Grice's cooperative principle and its maxims for evaluating coherence in texts as shown by Abidin (1996) who asserts that incoherence in students' writing is caused by the violations of the maxims of the cooperative principle.

The present study analyzed a small sample data; therefore, it invites a similar study in other academic settings so as to confirm the relevance of applying Grice's Cooperative principle for evaluating coherence. Again, as the study only focused on short essays (assignment) written by first year students, other further studies can also evaluate the rhetorical features of undergraduate dissertations such as abstract, background to the study or introduction.

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