**PhD Research Proposal**

**COHESION AND COHERENCE**

**IN TEXTS OF HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CYPRUS**

A body of scientific research as well as my personal in-class experience have shown that written discourse production is the most complex and difficult of all acts of speech communication performed by high-school students (aged roughly between 12-15), as these students are having difficulty in producing the text types requested of them in the “composition essay” course. High-school students in the Cypriot public education system, although being taught a variety of grammatical, syntactic and linguistic phenomena, seem to ignore the functions and usage of such phenomena when asked to produce written discourse. However, lexicogrammatical choices influence the cohesion and coherence of the produced text and, by extension, its clarity and untroubled reception. This research will set out to prove that systematic teaching of the function of cohesion and coherence mechanisms may afford students a deeper understanding of the mode of composition of a text, which will in turn enable them to produce qualitatively enhanced, communication-oriented texts.

More particularly, the ability to produce written discourse can only be achieved through appropriate systematic teaching. International scholarship (Myhill et al. 2013) has put forward the hypothesis that if students are taught cohesive devices, namely the specific relations created between the grammatical and lexical elements of the sentences that make up a text (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 2011), in alignment with specific principles and requirements, then they may perform better in writing such text types as description, recount or persuasion.

Emphasis will be placed on the following cohesive devices: a) personal reference, which incorporates the use of noun phrases, pronouns, and bound morphemes modifying verbs in order to demonstrate the identification of one entity with another b) ellipsis, that refers to the connection of the text’s parts through the omission of one element and c) substitution, which is performed with the use of grammatical elements that substitute for an entity. Also of importance are: d) conjunction, especially in accordance with the model for distinguishing metatextual indexes, which is appropriate for secondary education, with an initial division into textual indexes that show the organization of the text and interpersonal indexes that express the relation between author and reader and their involvement in textual interaction (Koutsoulelou 2018:248-250). Finally, e) lexical cohesion, which is based on semantic relations such as reiteration (partial or total), parallelism, paraphrase, synonymy, antonymy and the use of words from the same semantic field (Goutsos & Georgakopoulou 2011, Christiansen 2011, Taboada 2004, Tanskanen 2006).

The general purpose of teaching Modern Greek Language at High School and the Lyceum in Cyprus is the understanding, acquisition and excellent use of language. The teaching of the course aims at the attainment of the competences of comprehension and production of both oral and written texts across different text types that incorporate recount, description, persuasion and instructions. At High School, emphasis is placed on the textual type of description in 1st grade, recount in 2nd grade and persuasion in 3rd grade according to the Intended Learning Outcomes and the equivalent Curriculum (see Table 1).

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| **Table 1 Summary table of curriculum for written discourse production** | |
| Speech Organization-Textual Structure | **Models of organization – External components of a text,** depending on text type/genre, for instance: prologue – main part – epilogue |
| **Internal components of text/paragraph** (logic, spatial and temporal sequence, correspondence, unity, coherence and cohesion) |
| Components of a paragraph Ways to develop a paragraph Components of a paragraph (recognition) |

These texts are evaluated by the instructor using specific criteria. More particularly, the instructor performs the evaluation based on criteria associated with the selection of the appropriate text type/genre or text types, the occasion for communication, the purpose, proper use of language in terms of syntax, spelling, punctuation, appropriate style, speech organization, cohesion and coherence, as well as critical ability skills (critical discourse analysis, critical language awareness).

According to the Cypriot Ministry of Education’s Guide to the “Linguistic elements of oral and written texts”,[[1]](#footnote-2) cohesion is defined as “that characteristic of the text that pertains to the linguistic elements with which the sentences of a text are interlinked in order to form bigger units of speech, for instance with the use of linking words, conjunctions, pronouns, articles, synonyms, adverbs” and is mainly achieved with a. Signpost words (the words/phrases that link smaller or larger parts of Speech) b. Linking words/phrases that denote: addition/similarity: *also, consequently, naturally, certainly* etc., possibility: *perhaps, maybe, it is possible, I believe, I suppose* etc., necessity: *must, need, it is allowed, it is deemed necessary* etc., c. Causal conjunctions *(because, as, due to, since* etc.), d. Adverbs (temporal adverbs that show the temporal order-relevance of events *e.g. subsequently*) and e. Prepositional phrases, *e.g. in the course of, following the* etc.

*Coherence* is defined as the correspondence of meaning developed between the sentences of a paragraph or between the paragraphs of a text. The following diagram is cited here indicatively but may vary depending on the text type or genre.

Image 1. Indicative Diagram on the coherence of written texts by the Min. of Education.

The methodology used for text comprehension is the combined examination of content and form in a way that brings out the linguistic choices of the author and demonstrates how these contribute to constructing the meanings of the text. Reference is made to the context of communication, style and purpose, the author’s lexical and grammatical choices, but also to everything that pertains to the organisation/structure of speech and the text’s cohesion and coherence mechanisms. Morphosyntactic phenomena, a functional component of each text type, are also explored at High School. For the production of written texts, students are taught the three stages that pertain to text production: pre-writing, writing and post-writing.

It is inferred from the above overview of the Analytical Programmes (A.P.) that their reference to cohesion and coherence in student writing is restricted to signpost words, linking words/phrases, causal conjunctions and adverbs, while the other categories of cohesion are omitted. Also, across the three grades of High School, grammar is not taught with relevance to the textual type within which the production of written discourse will take place, nor does it focus on the functions of the elements of grammar, syntax and lexis. It appears that students are not aware of the different ways in which main sentences are interlinked and, even more importantly, of the mechanisms of logical sentence arrangement. They rarely think of the text in progress as a unified whole; instead, they focus their attention on what is going to follow immediately afterwards. In fact, the knowledge acquired from the unit on text comprehension does not appear to be put to use for the production of equivalent written texts by the students, whereas the three stages of text production are only vaguely mentioned.

To enable students to produce a cohesive written text to attain the objectives required by a systematic teaching of the categories of cohesion, specific methodology will be applied, based on recent international scholarship, and adjusted to the particularities of the Cypriot educational system.

The thesis will be structured as follows: Initially, a clarification will be made of the specific lexicogrammatical characteristics and the macrostructure of the three textual types, under the specific conditions of evaluation, required for “A” (Excellent) papers. Next, three text corpora will be created (based on the students’ level of competence) from earlier written texts by the students, which will be quantitatively analysed in order to draw the linguistic profile of these three categories of students.

Subsequently, the needs and weaknesses of the students will be recorded based on their own views of the difficulties they face in writing texts. The next stage is to create material based on the characteristics of the principles and procedures for pedagogy followed by Myhill et al. (2013) and Clark (2019) for student preparation. Teaching will be conducted based on those categories of cohesion and coherence that coincide with the objectives of the course regarding the teaching of grammar, syntax and vocabulary as set out in the textbook in order to be aligned with the purpose of creating descriptive, narrative and persuasive texts.

The school departments wherein the research will be conducted share a high degree of similarity in terms of age, and also in terms of the cognitive, social, financial, cultural level of the students, as well as vis-à-vis other characteristics. Two of the departments will function as an experimental group and the other two as a control group. The researcher, being a teacher at the school, will receive the students’ texts and create the analogous text corpora for all three categories of students. The principles followed by Grisot, considered appropriate for text analyses, will serve as model for the composition of the corpora. Therefore, the progress or non-progress of students in both groups will be assessed in terms of the investigated cohesion mechanisms they employ based on specific criteria (Inter-annotator Agreement and the Қ Coefficient), as described by Grisot (2018). Students are called upon to write four “composition essays” per year, based on a specific text type. Their progress will be assessed per essay.

Adequacy of the instructors is the *sine qua non* of the success of this endeavour, while the “contextualization” of grammar is necessary so that teaching grammar does not amount to sterile knowledge, as demonstrated by other studies (Varela 2010, Clark 2019, Grisot 2018 and Myhill & Watson 2014), but can help students with the production of cohesive and coherent texts. This last parameter is not systematically implemented within the High-School cycle of Cypriot education.

The aim of this doctoral thesis is to cover the designated gap in this area of scholarship on the didactics of texts; in other words, to create a specific linguistic context for teaching cohesion and coherence across the three text types included in the A.P. Therefore, by way of the systematic teaching of the function of cohesion and by putting its functions in practice in the context of the language course, students will be aided to improve their text writing. At the same time, the presentation of this particular field in the A.P. will also be improved upon.

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1. Website of Cyprus’ Ministry of Education on the course of Modern Greek Language: <http://ellim.schools.ac.cy/index.php/el/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)