

EVALUATING COHESION AND COHERENCE FAILURES IN GRADUATE THESIS DISCOURSE

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Abstract: In academic writing, quality is an important indicator of research competence, especially at the postgraduate level. Master's theses are expected to meet established standards of academic style and discourse organisation; however, many texts show persistent stylistic and discursive deficiencies. This research identifies the most common stylistic and discursive errors in master's theses and examines their impact on textual coherence, clarity, and academic credibility. Employing a qualitative research design, the study analyses a corpus of master's theses written in English by non-native speakers through stylistic and discourse-oriented textual analysis. The findings reveal that some common stylistic errors may include inappropriate lexical choice, redundancy, informality, and syntactic complexity, while discursive errors primarily include weak cohesion, unclear thematic progression, and inconsistent argument development. Various studies argue that these issues are closely linked to insufficient academic writing training, limited genre awareness, and the influence of native-language discourse patterns. The article summarises by emphasising the importance of systematic academic writing instruction and suggests pedagogically relevant strategies to develop stylistic accuracy and discourse competence in postgraduate education.

Keywords: academic writing; stylistic errors; discursive errors; master's thesis; discourse analysis; academic literacy

Introduction

In higher education, academic writing plays a vital role, especially at the postgraduate level, where students are expected to demonstrate not only subject-matter expertise but also advanced linguistic and discursive competence. A master's thesis represents a complicated academic genre that requires clarity of expression, logical organization, stylistic appropriateness, and adherence to established conventions of scientific discourse. In addition, the quality of academic writing directly affects the comprehensibility, credibility, and scholarly value of research outcomes.

Several studies show that, despite the growing emphasis on research skills, many master's students encounter serious difficulties in producing well-structured and stylistically consistent academic texts. These difficulties are especially evident in the frequent occurrence of stylistic and discursive errors, which undermine the coherence and effectiveness of academic communication. Such errors are not merely linguistic inaccuracies but reflect deeper issues related to academic literacy, discourse awareness, and genre competence. Stylistic errors in master's theses often manifest as inappropriate lexical choices, excessive verbosity, ambiguity, informal expressions, and deviations from the formal tone required in academic discourse. These issues may arise due to limited exposure to academic writing norms, insufficient mastery of academic vocabulary, or the influence of spoken language and non-academic registers. In many cases, students struggle to balance clarity and formality, resulting in texts that lack precision and academic rigour.

Discursive errors, on the other hand, concern the macro-level organization of the text and the logical development of ideas. They include weak cohesion between sentences and paragraphs, unclear thematic progression, inconsistent argumentation, and ineffective use of discourse

markers. Such problems significantly affect the readability of the thesis and make it difficult for readers to follow the author's line of reasoning. Discourse-related shortcomings often indicate an inadequate understanding of how academic arguments are constructed and sustained across extended texts. In multilingual academic contexts, these challenges are further intensified by the influence of the students' first language. Literal translation strategies, transfer of native discourse patterns, and differences in rhetorical traditions frequently lead to structural and stylistic mismatches in English academic writing. As a result, even conceptually strong research may fail to meet academic standards due to weaknesses in written presentation. Given the increasing importance of academic writing quality in postgraduate education, a systematic analysis of stylistic and discursive errors in master's theses is both timely and necessary. Identifying common error patterns and their underlying causes can provide valuable insights to improve academic writing instruction and support students' research communication skills. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the most common stylistic and discursive errors in master's thesis writing and to propose pedagogically relevant strategies to enhance academic discourse competence.

This study is conducted within a qualitative research framework, employing stylistic and discourse analysis as its primary methodological tools. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for examining academic texts, as it enables a detailed exploration of linguistic choices, textual organization, and discourse patterns that quantitative methods cannot fully capture. The research focuses on identifying recurring stylistic and discursive errors in master's theses and analyzing their impact on the overall coherence and academic quality of the texts. The research data consist of a selected corpus of master's theses written in English by non-native speakers. The theses were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure that the data were representative of common academic writing practices at the postgraduate level. The analyzed texts belong to various academic disciplines, primarily within the humanities and social sciences, which enabled a comparative examination of stylistic and discursive features across fields. All selected theses followed the standard academic structure, including an introduction, literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion.

The analysis process involved close reading and systematic examination of the texts. Stylistic errors were identified at the lexical, grammatical, and syntactic levels, with particular attention paid to inappropriate vocabulary usage, redundancy, informality, sentence complexity, and deviations from conventional academic style. Discursive errors were examined at the macro-textual level, focusing on cohesion, coherence, thematic progression, paragraph unity, and logical development of arguments. Discourse markers, referential devices, and transitions between sections were also analysed to assess the effectiveness of textual connectivity. All identified errors were categorised according to established principles of academic discourse and stylistic norms. The classification was guided by existing models of academic writing and discourse analysis, allowing the findings to be interpreted within a solid theoretical framework. To ensure analytical reliability, recurrent patterns were cross-checked across multiple texts, and similar error types were grouped to identify dominant tendencies in master's thesis writing. The methodological approach adopted in this study enables a comprehensive understanding of stylistic and discursive challenges faced by master's students. By combining textual analysis with discourse-oriented interpretation, the study provides a reliable basis for discussing the causes of academic writing deficiencies and for proposing pedagogically relevant recommendations aimed at improving postgraduate academic literacy.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that stylistic and discursive errors remain a significant challenge in master's thesis writing and substantially affect the overall quality of academic texts.

The findings indicate that such errors are not limited to surface-level linguistic inaccuracies but are closely connected to deeper issues of academic literacy, discourse competence, and genre awareness. Even when research content is conceptually strong, weaknesses in stylistic consistency and discourse organization can reduce the clarity, coherence, and persuasive power of scholarly communication.

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