Chapter 8 Organising the message: the textual metafunction - cohesion

1 Identifying cohesion in text

Below are the two extracts that you analysed in the exercise for Chapter 7.
First, analyse the cohesive markers in the two extracts, and decide which category of cohesive devices they belong to and how they are operating in the text. One feature which is particularly worth investigating in the use of the: for each instance it is worth considering what the basis is for the writer representing the nominal group with the as in some way identifiable by the reader.
The sentences have been numbered for ease of reference.

from the dissertation
[1] The results showed that the non-native speakers’ understanding of the headline of the article from their own country was extremely high and that they could easily predict the content of the article, which suggests that they already had the background knowledge on politics and that they would have certain expectations from that text. [2] On the other hand, the British subjects had great difficulty in guessing its content judging only from the title as they could only talk generally about it, being unable to make a successful prediction. [3] The non-native speaker subjects encountered more difficulties with the article from their country on a religious scandal, maybe because this scandal happened during their absence from home and they were not really informed. [4] On the other hand, they had few problems with the political article because this was mainly based on their general knowledge about politics rather than on the specific event that was being described.
[5] When they came to read the British article, the non-native speaker subjects faced many difficulties as many of them did not know basic concepts such as what is ‘Labour’ and which are the most important parties in the United Kingdom. [6] Of course, the subjects who had spent more years in the United Kingdom were able to predict the article’s content more successfully but at the time they could not reach a total understanding of what it was going to talk about, because their knowledge of the political situation in Britain was still restricted.
[7] What is more surprising is that the British subjects did not have a high understanding of the title because, like the non-native speaker subjects, they did not mention the reason that would cause Labour to lose safe seats. [8] Of course this is not an indication that they do not know the way elections work in the UK, but maybe they did not consider it was worth mentioning.

from the examiner’s comments
[1] In the Relevant Research Background chapter, there could be a little less weight on general factors which affect reading comprehension, and a little more on cultural factors specifically, but you show familiarity with, and understanding of, a good range of concepts, and there is a clear sense of development through most of the chapter, with different authors brought in in a way which suggests that the ideas have been assimilated. [2] The methodology chapter is successful: you worked out a fairly complex procedure for setting up the various stages of the data collection and analysis, and you not only carry it through skilfully but explain it carefully and clearly. [3] Although the fact that your non-native speaker subjects had such different amounts and types of experience of British culture makes it a little harder to compare the results, the inclusion of the English native speaker subjects is sensible and provides some unexpected side-lights on the topic. [4] The results are presented in a clear way, and you use the concepts introduced in the Research Background reasonably systematically. [5] The discussion of the results is thorough and sensible though it mostly stays at a relatively simple level: you achieve some perceptive interpretation, but in places the analysis could be pushed deeper – for example, I would have liked some discussion of the process by which, in a few cases, the readers managed to work out the meanings of initially unknown expressions by the end of the reading. [6] It is useful to look at three case studies to illustrate the general findings; but the relatively low scores of the NS readers could have been exploited a bit more since they reinforce the importance of background knowledge rather than linguistic proficiency. [7] The conclusions answer your research questions explicitly and appropriately, but, on the other hand, the outline of teaching implications is rather thin and generalised.

2 Discussing cohesion in text

Now consider the ways in which the patterns of cohesive signals that you have identified reflect the different purpose of the two extracts.