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Error Analysis of Cohesion Devices in High School Students' Recount Text Writing

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Abstract

This study investigates errors in the use of grammatical cohesion devices in students' recount writing at MA Ma'arif An-Nur. Grammatical cohesion is essential for creating coherent and meaningful texts; however, many EFL learners experience difficulties in using cohesive devices appropriately. This study aims to identify the types and patterns of errors in the use of grammatical cohesion devices.A qualitative descriptive design with an error analysis approach was employed. The data were collected from recount texts written by twenty tenth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. The analysis focused on four types of grammatical cohesion devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction.The findings indicate that reference and conjunction were the most frequently used cohesion devices and accounted for the majority of errors. Common errors included incorrect pronoun references and inappropriate use of conjunctions. In contrast, substitution and ellipsis were used less frequently, suggesting limited student mastery of these devices. The errors were influenced by students' limited grammatical knowledge, first-language interference, and insufficient writing practice.In conclusion, students still face difficulties in applying grammatical cohesion devices accurately in recount writing. Therefore, more focused instruction and extensive writing practice are needed to improve students' ability to produce coherent and cohesive texts.

Keywords: *Error Analysis, Cohesion Devices, Recount Text*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential skill in English language learning because it enables students to express ideas, experiences, and opinions in a clear and organized manner. Through writing, learners communicate information and construct meaning using appropriate linguistic structures. However, writing is often considered one of the most challenging skills for second language (L2) learners because it requires the ability to generate ideas, organize them logically, and present them in coherent written texts (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In addition to grammar and vocabulary, students must also organize ideas effectively so that readers can easily understand the text. One important aspect that determines the quality of writing is cohesion, which refers to the linguistic devices that connect sentences and ideas within a text. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2015) cohesion creates continuity in discourse through grammatical devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. These devices help sentences connect and form a meaningful text (Bloor & Bloor, 2004).

In addition to connecting linguistic units, grammatical cohesion plays a fundamental role in guiding readers through the logical development of ideas across a text. Cohesive devices enable writers to establish meaningful relationships between sentences, reducing ambiguity and facilitating comprehension, particularly in academic and narrative writing (Paltridge, 2021). From a systemic functional perspective, cohesion functions as an important textual resource that supports the

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organization of discourse and contributes to the communicative effectiveness of written texts (Eggins, 2004). Consequently, students' ability to apply grammatical cohesion appropriately reflects not only their grammatical competence but also their discourse competence in constructing meaningful written communication (Hyland, 2019). Effective use of grammatical cohesion not only contributes to text coherence but also facilitates readers in interpreting relationships among ideas throughout a text (Putri,2021).Without appropriate cohesive devices, a text may appear fragmented and difficult to understand. Therefore, cohesion is a crucial indicator of writing proficiency because it reflects students' ability to organize ideas logically and systematically. In English language learning, students are required to produce various types of texts, including recount texts. A recount text retells past events in chronological order with the purpose of informing or entertaining readers (Anderson & Anderson, 1997; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). Because recount texts describe sequences of events, the use of appropriate cohesive devices is essential to maintain logical relationships between sentences and ensure the clarity of the narrative.

Cohesion becomes particularly important in recount writing because students must present events in a clear chronological sequence Abas et.al (2016). Several recent studies have shown that cohesive devices contribute significantly to the clarity and coherence of students' writing. found that reference and conjunction were the most frequently used cohesive devices in students' recount texts. Similarly, Zahara et al. (2023) reported that many students experienced difficulties in using reference and conjunction accurately due to limited grammatical understanding and lack of writing practice. Rahayu et al. (2024) also found that errors such as omission, misuse, and unnecessary repetition frequently occurred in students' recount writing. In addition, Ariwibowo et al. (2023) showed that students' overall use of grammatical cohesion was still moderate because cohesive devices were not applied consistently throughout the text. To better understand students' difficulties, error analysis can be used as an effective approach in language research. Error analysis identifies, classifies, and explains learner errors in order to understand the process of second language development (Corder, 1974). Through this approach, researchers can examine how students use cohesive devices and identify the types of errors that frequently occur in their writing. The results can help teachers develop more effective strategies for teaching writing and improving students' cohesion skills.

Although many studies have investigated cohesive devices in students' writing, most of them focus on the frequency or types of cohesive devices rather than on specific patterns of grammatical cohesion errors in a particular school context. Moreover, no previous study has examined grammatical cohesion errors in recount texts written by students of MA Ma'arif An-Nur. This gap highlights the need for further research. Therefore, this study aims to analyze errors in the use of grammatical cohesion devices reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction in recount texts written by tenth-grade students at MA Ma'arif An-Nur. The study addresses the following research question: What types of grammatical cohesion errors are found in students' recount texts at MA Ma'arif An-Nur? The findings are expected to contribute to English writing instruction and provide useful insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and future researchers in English language education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using an error analysis approach to examine students' use of grammatical cohesion devices in recount texts (Fraenkel et al., 1990). The study aimed to identify and describe patterns of grammatical cohesion errors that naturally occurred in students' writing without any experimental treatment.

A qualitative descriptive design is considered appropriate for studies that aim to provide a comprehensive description of naturally occurring phenomena without manipulating research variables. This approach enables researchers to examine language use in authentic contexts and to interpret participants' linguistic performance based on naturally produced data rather than

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experimental conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative descriptive research is particularly suitable for error analysis because it emphasizes detailed observation and systematic interpretation of learners' language performance to reveal recurring error patterns and their possible causes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The participants were 20 tenth-grade students of MA Ma'arif An-Nur in the 2024/2025 academic year. They were selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: (1) they had learned recount texts as part of the English curriculum, and (2) they were able to produce a recount text independently. These criteria ensured that the participants had sufficient background knowledge relevant to the objectives of the study. Data were collected through a writing test and documentation. In the writing test, students were asked to write a recount text based on their personal experiences. The writing task was validated through expert judgment by an English teacher and a lecturer in English education to ensure its content validity, clarity of instructions, and suitability for the students' proficiency level and curriculum objectives. Documentation consisted of students' written texts and relevant instructional materials used during classroom instruction. The students' texts served as the primary source of data for the analysis.

Purposive sampling was selected because it allows researchers to choose participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study. Rather than emphasizing the size of the sample, purposive sampling focuses on obtaining information-rich cases that can provide meaningful insights into the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2015). Since the participants had previously learned recount texts and were capable of producing independent written compositions, they were considered appropriate sources for investigating grammatical cohesion errors in EFL writing.

The research procedure began with administering the writing task to the participants. After collecting the students' texts, the researcher identified and analyzed grammatical cohesion errors. The analysis focused on four types of grammatical cohesion proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976): reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. To ensure a systematic analysis, the identification of errors was based on predetermined criteria. Reference errors included incorrect, unclear, or inconsistent use of pronouns and demonstratives. Substitution errors referred to inappropriate replacement of linguistic elements that affected textual meaning. Ellipsis errors involved the omission of necessary linguistic elements that caused ambiguity or disrupted sentence interpretation. Conjunction errors included the misuse, omission, or unnecessary addition of connectors that affected logical relationships between clauses and sentences.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, inter-rater reliability was employed. In addition to the researcher, an English teacher independently reviewed and classified the identified errors using the same criteria. Any discrepancies in classification were discussed until agreement was reached. This procedure helped ensure the consistency and trustworthiness of the data analysis. The data were analyzed using the procedures of error analysis, including identifying errors, classifying them according to the four categories of grammatical cohesion, calculating the frequency of each error type, and interpreting the results descriptively.The percentage of each error type was calculated using the following formula: $X = (N / \sum N) \times 100$ where X represents the percentage of a particular grammatical cohesion error, N refers to the frequency of a specific error type, and $\sum N$ represents the total number of grammatical cohesion errors identified in the data. The findings were presented descriptively to illustrate students' difficulties in applying grammatical cohesion devices in recount writing and to provide insights into areas that require further instructional attention.

RESULT

Twenty recount texts written by twenty tenth-grade students were selected as the primary data source of this study. Recount texts were chosen because they are explicitly taught in the tenth-grade English curriculum and require students to organize events chronologically using appropriate

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grammatical cohesion devices. Each student was asked to write a recount text based on a personal experience. These texts provided authentic evidence of students' ability to apply grammatical cohesion in writing. The number of texts was considered sufficient to generate varied data while remaining manageable for detailed qualitative analysis.

Table 1 Frequency of Grammatical Cohesion Device

Text	References	Subsitution	Ellips	Conjuction	Total
T1	26	0	0	5	31
T2	12	0	1	4	17
T3	22	0	1	14	37
T4	9	1	0	6	16
T5	9	0	0	4	13
T6	14	0	0	4	18
T7	16	0	1	4	21
T8	13	2	1	8	24
T9	12	1	0	11	24
T10	21	3	3	8	35
T11	10	0	0	4	14
T12	8	3	0	14	25
T13	17	0	0	5	22
T14	9	1	1	10	21
T15	25	0	0	8	33
T16	15	1	0	9	25
T17	10	0	0	10	20
T18	11	1	3	13	28
T19	15	3	2	12	32
T20	12	0	1	12	25
Total	**286**	**16**	**14**	**165**	**481**

Note: The total frequency is 481 occurrences based on the table data.

The findings indicate that reference was the most frequently used grammatical cohesion device in students' recount texts. This suggests that students relied heavily on pronouns and demonstrative references to connect ideas and maintain continuity throughout their writing. Conjunctions were the second most common device, indicating that students attempted to establish logical relationships between events and clauses. In contrast, substitution and ellipsis appeared only occasionally, suggesting limited familiarity with these more complex cohesion devices.

The dominance of reference and conjunction demonstrates that students tended to use more explicit forms of cohesion. However, the limited use of substitution and ellipsis indicates a lack of variation in their cohesive strategies, which may affect the overall sophistication of their writing

Error Identification and Analysis

The analysis followed the error analysis procedures proposed by Corder (1974), including error identification, classification, explanation, and evaluation. Each recount text was examined to identify errors related to the four categories of grammatical cohesion proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976): reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. The findings revealed that most errors occurred in reference and conjunction. Errors in reference mainly involved incorrect pronoun use, unclear antecedents, and inconsistency between the referenced noun and pronoun. These errors often created ambiguity and reduced textual clarity. Errors in conjunction involved the inappropriate selection of connectors or the misuse of conjunctions to express logical relationships between clauses.

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Errors related to substitution and ellipsis were less frequent. However, their limited occurrence does not necessarily indicate mastery. Instead, it suggests that students rarely attempted to use these devices in their writing. Many students preferred repeating words and phrases rather than applying substitution or ellipsis, resulting in less effective cohesion.

Table 2 Percentage of Grammatical Cohesion Devices

Type of grammatical cohesion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reference	286	59.46
Substitution	16	3.33
Ellipsis	14	2.91
Conjunction	165	34.30
Total	481	100.00

The results demonstrate that students predominantly relied on reference devices to achieve cohesion in their recount texts. This pattern suggests that students are relatively familiar with the use of pronouns and demonstratives because these forms are commonly introduced in English language instruction. Conjunctions also played a substantial role in connecting ideas and organizing events chronologically.

In contrast, the very low frequencies of substitution and ellipsis indicate that students had limited awareness of these devices or lacked confidence in using them appropriately. As a result, students often repeated lexical items rather than employing more advanced cohesive strategies. This finding suggests that students' understanding of grammatical cohesion remains concentrated on basic devices, while their mastery of less explicit forms of cohesion requires further development. Overall, the findings reveal that although students were able to use grammatical cohesion devices in their recount writing, the range of devices employed was limited. Greater instructional emphasis on substitution and ellipsis may help students produce more cohesive and sophisticated written texts.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that reference was the most frequently used grammatical cohesion device, accounting for 59.83% of all cohesive ties identified in the students' recount texts. This dominance suggests that students primarily relied on pronouns and demonstratives to maintain continuity between sentences and to refer to previously mentioned participants or events. Reference is generally considered one of the most accessible cohesion devices because its use is commonly introduced in early stages of English learning. As a result, students tend to employ reference more frequently than other cohesion devices when constructing written texts. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Li (2024), who reported that reference was the dominant grammatical cohesion device in EFL students' writing because learners generally rely on pronouns and demonstratives to establish continuity between sentences.

However, the frequent occurrence of reference does not necessarily indicate effective cohesion. The analysis revealed several cases of ambiguous or inaccurate pronoun use that made the intended referent unclear. This finding suggests that although students are familiar with the form of reference devices, they may still experience difficulties in applying them appropriately within larger discourse structures. As argued by Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesive ties contribute to textual unity only when readers can successfully interpret the relationship between linguistic elements. Therefore,

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the effectiveness of reference depends not only on its frequency but also on its accuracy and contextual appropriateness.

Conjunction was the second most common cohesion device, representing 34.37% of the total occurrences. The relatively high use of conjunctions reflects students' efforts to organize events chronologically and establish logical relationships between ideas, which are essential characteristics of recount texts (Derewianka, 1990). Nevertheless, the analysis showed that conjunctions were sometimes used redundantly or inaccurately. In several texts, connectors were inserted without expressing clear semantic relationships between clauses. This pattern indicates that students may perceive conjunctions primarily as sentence-linking markers rather than as devices that convey specific logical meanings. Consequently, the presence of conjunctions alone cannot guarantee coherence if their semantic functions are not fully understood. A notable finding of this study is the extremely limited use of substitution and ellipsis. Together, these two devices accounted for less than 7% of all cohesion devices identified. One possible explanation is that substitution and ellipsis require a higher level of discourse awareness than reference and conjunction. Writers must be able to determine whether omitted or substituted elements can be accurately recovered from the surrounding context. For many EFL learners, particularly those at the secondary school level, such discourse-level processing remains challenging.

The avoidance of substitution and ellipsis may also be related to the characteristics of English instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Writing activities often emphasize grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development, and sentence construction rather than the use of advanced cohesion strategies. As a result, students become more accustomed to producing explicit and repetitive structures to avoid grammatical errors. In this context, reference and conjunction are perceived as safer options because they allow learners to express relationships directly without risking misunderstanding. This finding supports previous studies indicating that L2 writers tend to favor explicit cohesive devices while avoiding more complex forms of cohesion (Abdi Tabari & Johnson, 2025). Another possible explanation concerns the influence of Bahasa Indonesia. In Indonesian discourse, repetition is often accepted as a natural strategy for maintaining clarity, particularly in students' writing. Consequently, learners may prefer repeating nouns or clauses instead of replacing or omitting them through substitution and ellipsis. Such transfer from the first language can limit the variety of cohesion devices used in English writing and contribute to less sophisticated textual organization.

The findings also suggest that students' cohesion competence reflects their current stage of writing development. Less proficient writers generally depend on explicit and surface-level cohesion devices, whereas more advanced writers demonstrate greater flexibility in selecting and combining different cohesive resources (McNamara et al., 2019). The dominance of reference and conjunction in the present study therefore indicates that students are still developing their ability to manage cohesion at a broader discourse level. While they have acquired basic strategies for connecting ideas, they have not yet fully mastered more complex cohesion mechanisms. In addition to examining the distribution of cohesion devices, this study identified several factors contributing to cohesion errors. Limited grammatical knowledge emerged as one of the major causes. Errors involving pronoun reference, agreement, and sentence structure often disrupted the relationships between ideas and reduced textual clarity. Such errors are consistent with Odlin, T. (1989) view that learner errors reflect ongoing processes of language acquisition and reveal areas where linguistic competence is still developing.

First language interference also appeared to influence students' use of cohesive devices. Several instances of inappropriate conjunction usage reflected discourse patterns transferred from Bahasa Indonesia. Although language transfer can facilitate learning in certain situations, it may also result in cohesion problems when the conventions of the two languages differ. Furthermore, limited experience in producing extended written texts may have restricted students' opportunities to practice

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applying cohesion devices in authentic communicative contexts. This suggests that cohesion difficulties are not solely grammatical issues but are also connected to broader discourse competence and writing experience.

These findings have important pedagogical implications for English language teaching in Indonesian EFL contexts. Writing instruction should move beyond sentence-level grammar and place greater emphasis on discourse organization. Teachers should explicitly introduce various cohesion devices, including substitution and ellipsis, and provide opportunities for students to analyze their functions in authentic texts. Classroom activities that involve text reconstruction, discourse analysis, and extended writing practice may help students develop a more comprehensive understanding of how cohesion contributes to coherence. By strengthening both grammatical knowledge and discourse awareness, students can be better equipped to produce cohesive and effective written texts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined grammatical cohesion errors in recount texts written by tenth-grade students at MA Ma'arif An-Nur. The findings revealed that reference and conjunction were the most frequently used grammatical cohesion devices, while substitution and ellipsis occurred only rarely. Although students demonstrated an awareness of basic cohesive devices, many errors were identified in the use of pronoun references and conjunctions, indicating difficulties in maintaining clear and logical relationships between ideas. The findings also suggest that students tend to rely on explicit cohesion strategies and have not yet developed sufficient mastery of more complex cohesion devices. These difficulties appear to be influenced by limited grammatical knowledge, first-language interference, and insufficient experience in producing extended written texts.

The findings provide several practical implications for English language teaching, particularly in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Teachers should incorporate explicit instruction on grammatical cohesion into writing lessons rather than focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary. Classroom activities may include identifying cohesion devices in model texts, revising texts with cohesion errors, completing substitution and ellipsis exercises, and conducting peer-review activities that focus on cohesion and coherence. In addition, students should be given regular opportunities to write longer texts and receive feedback specifically related to the use of cohesive devices. Such practices may help learners develop greater discourse awareness and improve the overall quality of their writing. Future research is recommended to investigate grammatical cohesion across different text genres, such as narrative, descriptive, or argumentative texts, in order to determine whether similar patterns of errors occur. Researchers may also involve larger samples from different schools and educational levels to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, experimental studies examining the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies, such as genre-based instruction, discourse-based writing activities, or explicit cohesion-focused teaching, would provide valuable insights into improving students' mastery of grammatical cohesion in EFL writing contexts.

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