

**Exploring Grammatical Cohesion in Grade 10 Learners'  
Academic Texts at Two Selected Schools in Maseru**



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**201501253**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for**

**Master of Arts in English Language and Linguistics in the**

**Department of English, Faculty of Humanities**

**at**

**the National University of Lesotho**

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**August 2024**

**Certification**

This serves to certify that this dissertation has been read and approved as having met the requirements of the Department of English in the Faculty of Humanities, National University of Lesotho for the award of Master of Arts Degree in English Language and Linguistics.

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**Declaration**

I, Matšelisio Mary Chere, declare that this dissertation, which I herewith Submit for the Master of Arts in English and Linguistics at the National University of Lesotho, is my original work. I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at any other institution of higher education.

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Matšelisio Mary Chere

Date

### **Acknowledgements**

I am most thankful to God for granting me the power and knowledge to accomplish this task. I am also deeply grateful to Dr Mokhoele Aaron Hala-hala for supervising my work and for his support, motivation and advice during this study. His unwavering support, constructive criticism, patience and open-mindedness enabled me to complete this study and made this tough journey seem like a walk in the park. He truly deserves my sincere gratitude and I wish him well in his mentoring endeavours.

My ardent gratitude goes to my language editor, Dr Mahao Mahao for editing my work. My gratitude also extends to the English Department at the National University of Lesotho. I am also grateful to the two schools for granting me access to their premises; I sincerely appreciate the participants' willingness to partake in this study.

I want to thank my fellow researchers and colleagues whose inquisitive minds opened my mind to new ideas. In no particular order, I thank: Ms 'Mamotena Ntlhaba, Ms Lieketseng Moleleki, Mr Tlesi Ramaleka, Ms Politi Mohau, Mr Koali and Ms Kabelo Setsoto. They have all been super helpful and resourceful in walking this academic journey with me.

Finally, also deserving my gratitude: My mother, 'M'e 'Matumelo Chere for her endless support, and my brother, Tšeliso Chere from whom I have received moral support. They have all served as motivation, support and comfort throughout my academic career.

### **Abstract**

Writing practices in academic texts have piqued the interest of academics worldwide. Educators teaching English as a second language (ESL) have endeavoured to address writing difficulties their learners encounter. However, not much attention has been drawn to cohesion in writing in Lesotho. This study aimed to investigate grammatical cohesion in Grade 10 learners' academic texts at two selected schools in Maseru. Based on the qualitative research design, the study adopted semi-structured interviews, diagnostic tests and documentary sources for data collection to achieve the overarching aim of the study.

The study has, therefore, identified various cohesive devices used by students, such as references and conjunctions. Specifically, using the aforementioned instruments to collect oral and written data from the target participants, this study discovered that personal references were the most frequently used types of references and additive conjunctions were also often employed by students from both schools. The usages identified include systematic salient patterns of redundant, missing, misused cohesive devices and zero articles by the participating students. This study, therefore, concludes by highlighting the challenges faced by learners with regard to cohesion and coherence in academic writing, thus calling for language practitioners in high schools in Lesotho to reconsider their approaches to teaching cohesive devices for enhancing students' writing practices.

**Key terms:** Cohesion, Reference, Conjunctions, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and Text Linguistics

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- ECOL** – Examinations Council of Lesotho
- EFL** – English as a Foreign Language
- ENL** – English as a Native Language
- ESL** – English as a Second Language
- LGCSE** – Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education
- MOET** – Ministry of Education and Training
- NUL** – National University of Lesotho

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## CHAPTER ONE

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### 1.0 Introduction

The current chapter presents the background to the study, the problem statement, the aim, the research questions and the corresponding objectives. It then presents the significance of the study and reviews the related literature. Moreover, this chapter comprises the research design and methodology along with ethical considerations that were considered in this study; it also introduces data analysis tools used.

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Writing practices have piqued the interest of scholars worldwide. In academic writing, students should comprehend the concepts of effective writing techniques. However, writing has been deemed to be problematic in academic settings, prompting scholars to develop theories aimed at improving writing skills. One prominent perspective in discourse analysis is cohesion theory, pioneered by Halliday and Hasan (1976). According to this theory, texts must incorporate linguistic elements that connect different parts, guaranteeing that the text is cohesive and consistent as a complete unit (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesion is also recognised as a fundamental aspect of textuality within text linguistics (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). Scholars in discourse analysis have extensively explored cohesion concepts, particularly within cognitive and social dimensions, with notable contributions from scholars such as Van Dijk (1981).

Furthermore, a discourse analytic perspective of cohesion marks a shift from the prescriptive view of language. Cohesion in writing is generally considered a descriptive theory of language. It focuses on how language creates connections within texts, emphasising the importance of understanding and describing linguistic structures and their functions in communication. This contrasts with prescriptive theories, which dictate how language should be used according to established norms. Descriptive approaches prioritise actual usage over prescribed rules, allowing for a more flexible understanding of language dynamics in various contexts (Brown & Yule, 1983). The traditional view of cohesion can be traced back to early rhetoricians like Aristotle, who discussed the importance of logical and structural connectors. In the educational context, cohesion is often taught as a crucial aspect of writing and comprehension. The focus is on helping students use cohesive devices effectively to produce coherent texts and understand the relationship between ideas in reading materials. Bamberg (1983) states that

interest in cohesion in education can be traced back to the nineteenth century. The importance of cohesion in education is also noted by prominent scholars such as Halliday (1985) and Widdowson (1978). The seminal works of the previously mentioned scholars have sparked interest in cohesion from different countries around the world.

A significant portion of research on cohesion has been directed towards Asian countries where English is learned as a foreign language, rather than in countries where English is the native language. Such research was conducted by scholars such as Wang and Guo (2014); Yingle and Xueai (2019) and Zhou, Cao, Zhou, Zhang and He (2023), particularly in China. Consequently, for years, educators have sought effective methods to teach writing, particularly in ESL settings (Ghasemi, 2013; Khalil, Abu-Ayyash & Salhieh, 2022; Magogwe, Mokibelo & Karabo, 2023; Urmila, 2021). Furthermore, as per the natural order theory, writing tends to be the last language skill acquired despite its equal importance alongside other skills. Proficiency in writing holds huge significance in academic settings where English serves as a second or foreign language. Nevertheless, scholars note that teaching writing remains notably neglected in language programmes, both native and foreign (Abdissa & Kelemework, 2014).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Lesotho has used English as a secondary official language since the early nineteenth century, making it one of the country's earliest examples of colonial and Western influence. As the second official language, English holds paramount importance as a primary medium of communication in business, education, government and other key domains. Moreover, it is the predominant language of instruction from upper primary to university. Its significance is underscored by its status as a compulsory subject. Therefore, in Lesotho, English demands serious consideration across all its aspects for the nation to fully benefit from it (Khathi & Khathi, 2009).

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) initiated the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) to abolish English as a passing subject aiming to enhance students' proficiency and facilitate smoother transitions into higher education. Despite these efforts, students continue to encounter academic challenges in English. Universities universally require a minimum grade of C (60%) in English for admission into all degree programmes regardless of specialisation (Lekhetho, 2021). Therefore, proficiency in English is essential for admission into higher education institutions and for comprehending course content predominantly delivered in English.

Moreover, in a competitive academic environment, proficiency in writing is indispensable. University students frequently make syntactic, spelling and grammatical mistakes that undermine the coherence of their writing. The problem of cohesion, grammar or writing is a common concern even in other contexts, places or countries. Both educators and students observe that mastering writing skills appears more challenging and demanding than other aspects of language learning. Recent studies in Lesotho, including Hala-hala's (2021) research on the sociolinguistics of English, highlighted issues such as zero articles in exophoric references indicating a need for further exploration of cohesive writing strategies. Letsoela (2013) investigated the inappropriate usage of transitions. The study demonstrated the necessity to investigate transitions further. While much attention has been directed towards identifying errors that correlate to low academic performance in English writing, there remains a dearth of research addressing the broader issue of coherence in students' writing in Lesotho.

### **1.3 Aim of the Study**

This study aimed to explore grammatical cohesion in Grade 10 learners' academic texts at two selected schools in Maseru.

#### ***1.3.1 Specific Research Questions***

To focus on the research problem, this study formulated the following research questions:

- a) What are the cohesive devices used in Grade 10 learners' academic texts?
- b) To what extent do Grade 10 students employ cohesive devices in their academic texts?
- c) What could be the reasons for using such cohesive devices in their academic texts?

#### ***1.3.2 Specific Research Objectives***

This study aimed to accomplish the following research objectives:

- a) To investigate the cohesive devices that students use in their academic texts;
- b) To determine the extent to which cohesive devices are employed in Grade 10 learners' academic texts;
- c) To identify the reasons for using such cohesive devices in their academic texts.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study was motivated by initial explorations into cohesive studies. As a former undergraduate student, I received instruction on cohesive devices. This helped me to recognise their importance and inspired the present study. A thorough engagement with literature on discourse analysis, textuality and coherence further emphasised the substantial contribution of these elements to effective writing and enhancing writing quality. Given that grammatical

cohesion has been extensively studied in numerous English-speaking regions, I identified a pertinent gap necessitating a study on grammatical cohesion within the context of Lesotho. Consequently, I sought to explore how learners employ cohesive devices and compare these practices with existing studies on grammatical cohesion worldwide.

The theoretical and empirical value of this research lies in advancing my understanding of these focused concepts and potentially benefiting other readers and scholars interested in text linguistics and coherence studies. This study holds significance by contributing to academic excellence and providing valuable insights to researchers. Its findings could provide a reference for other scholars seeking to build upon or validate their own research ideas. Writing assumes a pivotal role in learning as it reflects a student's comprehension and their ability to express ideas while adhering to grammatical conventions. According to Urmila (2021: 1), "In writing, especially in academic writing, students need to understand the techniques to write properly. Coherence and cohesion are among the important elements that students need to master".

Therefore, this study is particularly pertinent as it may help address academic performance issues in secondary education. Furthermore, it may offer potential benefits to students by enhancing their writing skills and standards while also equipping educators with deeper insights into the challenges students encounter when composing texts. The solutions generated from this research could have broad applicability across various subjects, potentially improving students' overall performance and contributing to enhanced educational outcomes in schools.

### **1.5 Literature Review: An Overview**

The reviewed literature of this study centres around cohesion theory. It mainly focuses on grammatical cohesion and how it is used to achieve coherence in writing. Focus is placed on the countries that speak English as a native language (ENL), countries that speak English as a second language (ESL) and countries that speak English as a foreign language (EFL) for comparative purposes. Additionally, the theory that informs this study was developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and can be traced back to discourse analysis theories, pragmatics and empirical research by such scholars as Harris (1952) and various sociolinguistic studies conducted by Labov (1960s-1970s) which emphasise the role of narrative structures in maintaining coherence.

Furthermore, cohesion theory stretches the notion that connectedness in a text is realised using cohesive devices. Halliday and Hasan (1976) observe that there are two types of cohesion: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. In grammatical cohesion, the text is linked through

cohesive tools such as reference, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis. Cohesion is essential for written communication hence a text lacking coherence is unlikely to effectively convey its message to the reader (Urmila, 2021). Further exploration of grammatical cohesion can be found in Chapter Two. Several studies have been conducted on grammatical cohesion. Alsariera and Yunus (2021), Bahaziq (2016) and Lee (2002) examined reference and other components of coherence. Their focus was on cohesive devices used by students and the problems they encountered while using them. More information on empirical literature will be covered in Chapter Two. The next section provides a sketch of the research design and methodology of the study.

### **1.6 Research Design and Methodology**

The research design and methodology of this study have been predominantly based on qualitative approaches to research supplemented by quantitative data for emphasis and improved comprehension of the research problem. The participants of this study involved humans as units of analysis. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were employed to select participants. With content analysis and diagnostic tests, the study has drawn on cohesive tools used in Grade 10 learners' written compositions and speeches. Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell's (2018) and Taherdoost's (2021) qualitative approaches have been applied in the design of this study

Like all research involving human participants, this study adhered to ethical guidelines. Permission was obtained from the administrations of the selected schools in Maseru, Lesotho. Additionally, ethical considerations were observed, including citing all sources in the Harvard referencing style in every part of the dissertation (refer to the third chapter for specifics). For data analysis, both content analysis and thematic analysis were employed. These methods were selected for their capability to address diverse types of qualitative data, encompassing text, audio and visual materials. The thematic analysis specifically aids in comprehending the data by identifying and interpreting themes and patterns (Neuendorf, 2017; Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009). Chapter Three provides an in-depth explanation of the analytical framework used in this study and offers additional details on the design, including its triangulated approach.

### **1.7 Structure of the Study**

This chapter has introduced the phenomenon under investigation, outlining the problem statement, background of the study and research design and methodology. Chapter Two reviews relevant theories and literature pertinent to the study, with a focus on cohesion theory. Chapter Three offers a comprehensive explanation of the research design and methodology, including

sampling, data collection tools and techniques, data analysis methods and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents and examines the data, addressing the research questions and discussing findings in relation to the thesis statement, research questions and objectives. Finally, Chapter Five summarises the key findings, draws conclusions and discusses the study's limitations and future recommendations.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the related literature that informed this study. It delves into the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the research, with particular emphasis on cohesion theory, which serves as the foundation for this study. It is structured into three key sections. Section 2.1 explores the theoretical underpinnings of this study. It is followed by Section 2.2 which examines empirical studies, focusing on research conducted both globally and locally. Finally, Section 2.3 summarises the key points of the chapter. The theoretical frameworks underpinning the present study are explored in the following section.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study centres around cohesion theory developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). As previously stated, this paper is concerned with grammatical cohesion in continuous writing. Before exploring what grammatical cohesion entails, it is prudent to provide a discussion on cohesion theory. Linguists agree that Jakobson (1966) conducted the first research on cohesion by examining syntactic structure and parallelism in poetry literary texts. Cohesion is part of discourse analysis and pragmatics. Discourse analysis and pragmatics mark the shift from a formalist approach to language advocated by Chomsky (1957) to a territory marked with much freedom of expression. Brown and Yule (1983: 1) state that “the discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what language is used for. While the formal approach has a long tradition, manifested in innumerable volumes of grammar, the functional approach is less well-documented.”

Discourse analysis, pragmatics and text linguistics play a crucial role in understanding cohesion in texts. Gee (2014) describes discourse analysis as the examination of language that goes beyond individual sentences. It concentrates on the structure and purpose of verbal and written communication in different contexts. Discourse analysis investigates language practises in society that are influenced by social interactions, as well as, how meaning is established and interpreted in various situations. It explores features like coherence, cohesion and the roles of participants in communication. Discourse analysis is usually associated with pragmatics. For Yule (2016), pragmatics is the study of how the environment influences the interpretation of meaning during communication. It focuses on the use of language in social settings and how speakers use context to convey and comprehend implicit meanings, intentions and social subtleties. Pragmatics examines aspects like speech acts, implicature and deixis.

Therefore, cohesion is both a pragmatic and discourse analysis phenomenon. As such, Halliday and Hasan (1976) consider cohesion a necessary component of textuality. This view aligns with Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981) opinion that textuality encompasses traits that shape a text's structure and readability. In modern linguistics, the emphasis initially centred on sentence-level analysis with sentences viewed as self-contained units of structure and meaning. Whatever structures emerged outside of the phrase were given to the sphere of stylistics.

However, Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) further note that this approach faced limitations in explaining bigger language units, paragraphs and texts, prompting the development of text linguistics. They observed that when moving beyond the sentence level, it becomes more challenging to determine a grammatically correct textual unit. Once the boundaries of a single sentence are crossed, a new domain is entered that offers greater flexibility in word choice or variation and less strict adherence to established grammatical rules. As a result, text linguistics emerged to explore phenomena that sentence-level analysis alone could not fully address, such as cohesion (how elements within a text connect) and coherence (how a text makes sense as a whole) (Van De Poel, 2003).

Consequently, in text linguistics, the emphasis is on identifying and differentiating between various conventions of textuality, such as coherence, cohesion, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, contextuality and intertextuality. According to Van De Poel (2003), understanding these principles helps assess whether a text is acceptable. Therefore, each text strives to be meaningful, that is, to achieve coherence along with the previously mentioned standards of textuality.

As such, cohesion is the connection of elements in a text to create an integrated unit. According to Jabur (2023: 3) "cohesion is the state of cohering, uniting, or sticking together. Something that sticks together needs some elements that provide the strength to hold parts of a whole together. In linguistics, cohesion denotes the unity found within written texts or spoken discourse segments, which arises from connections among their surface elements". This includes instances such as repeated words within a sentence and importantly, the reliance of certain words or phrases on preceding or subsequent text for their meaning.

Cohesion semantically distinguishes a text from other pieces of discourse. A text can be presented orally or in written form, whether it takes the shape of prose, verse, dialogue, or monologue; A text represents a functional unit of language distinct from grammatical units like clauses or sentences and is not constrained by its size. It should be regarded as a semantic

entity—a unit that conveys meaning rather than mere form. A text possesses a texture that sets it apart from non-textual content. This texture derives from the text's ability to function cohesively within its context. When a segment of English composed of several sentences is identified as a text, it will display particular linguistic characteristics that enhance its overall coherence, thereby providing texture (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Furthermore, cohesion is attained when sentences and ideas are logically interconnected, creating a smooth flow. Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical connections within a text, such as the use of pronouns, conjunctions and lexical ties that link sentences and phrases together. Poudel (2018) acknowledges that a lack of cohesiveness in a written text can impede the reader's comprehension of its ideas and main points. Therefore, cohesion can be described as the way utterances in a text appear in context. Specifically, the appropriateness of the text aids in interpreting its content or message. Moreover, cohesion facilitates the reader's smooth progression from one point to another in a text. It focuses on the surface structure of a text ensuring that it flows logically at a basic level.

Additionally, cohesion is sometimes considered synonymous with coherence. Coherence refers to the unity within written texts or spoken discourse segments that stems from connections among their underlying ideas, the logical organisation and the development of their thematic content (Jabur, 2023). Nordquist (2018), views cohesion as the process of binding sentences together via a range of linguistic and semantic links to create coherence. Therefore, coherence requires cohesion to function effectively. A coherent text must also be cohesive, that is, it must use appropriate linguistic devices to connect ideas in a way that supports the logical structure of the text. Van Dijk (1985) asserts that a well-organised argument or narrative can still be challenging to follow if it lacks cohesive elements that clearly link different parts of the text.

Therefore, cohesion is a concept of meaning that pertains to the meaningful links in a text, shaping its identity. It emerges when the comprehension of an entity in a text relies on another. Each element suggests the presence of the other, making it impossible to fully grasp one without considering the other. This interdependence creates a cohesive relationship, weaving together the elements that presuppose and are presupposed into the overall structure of the text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

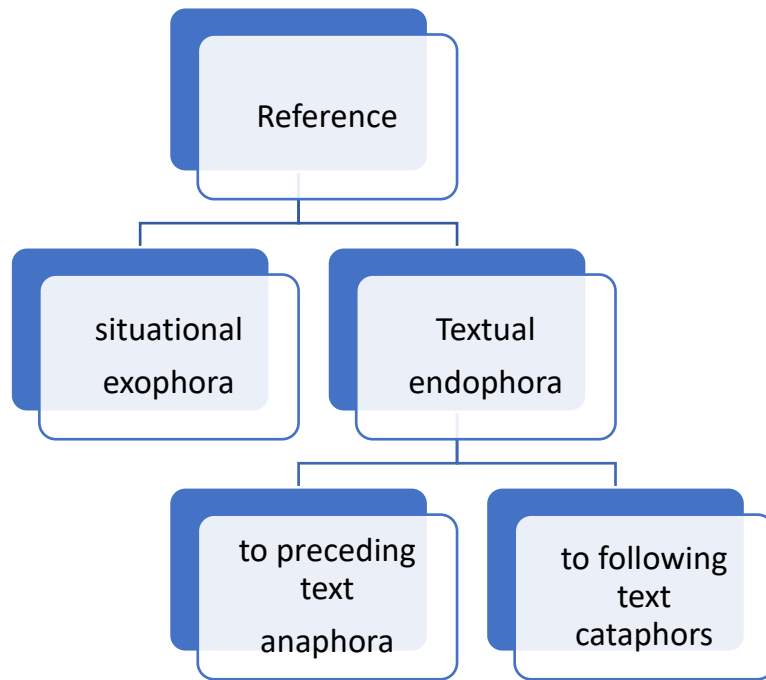
Cohesion theory is suitable for this study since it offers a descriptive view of language, and therefore helps analyse language in its natural context. Xin-hong (2023) articulates that cohesion theory is grounded in the analysis of real texts, observing how cohesion functions in

natural language use. It describes how language users create meaning and coherence in communication reflecting actual usage patterns rather than prescribing how they should link ideas. However, in an educational setting, the two approaches of language (prescriptive and descriptive) can be merged to enhance cohesion and its comprehension. As previously mentioned, cohesion theory focuses on how elements within texts work together to create unity (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). This aligns with the emphasis of the descriptive approach on function and context in a language. It also accounts for the role of context in understanding text cohesion, emphasising how meaning is derived from the interplay of textual elements and their environment. This is achieved through cohesive ties

Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify cohesive ties into grammatical and lexical cohesion. They explain that grammatical cohesion links the external structure of a text through cohesive devices like reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. The specified cohesive ties are sources of texture or coherence in a text (Jabur, 2023). For this study, reference and conjunction were considered while ellipsis and substitution were omitted because they are mostly used in conversation than in written texts. Xi-hong (2007) postulates that “substitution is rarely used in written texts and therefore in written texts such as compositions it is basically of no statistical value”.

### ***2.1.1 Reference***

Reference cohesion arises when one aspect in the text directs the reader to the other component for its meaning. Ermanto and Tahar (2018) point out that “Reference cohesion is one type of grammatical cohesion in the form of a particular lingual unit that refers to other lingual units that precede and follow it”. Jabur (2023) clarifies that reference can be considered cohesive because the interpretive source may also be found in the text itself. However, Reference is constrained to the identity relationship that exists between two linguistic expressions. From a traditional perspective, in discourse analysis and pragmatics, referring is not an inherent function of an expression; rather, it is an action that a speaker or writer can perform using that expression (Brown & Yule, 1983). Therefore, reference is considered an act carried out by the individual when communicating. Types of references include personal, demonstrative and comparative references. References can be endophoric (occurring within a text) and exophoric (pointing to something outside a text). This is illustrated by the structure below adopted from Halliday and Hasan (1976: 33).



Exophoric reference uses a general term for a group of similar things without identifying them for example, instead of introducing a notion, a generic phrase like “everything” is used. The writer or speaker avoids specifying individuals or occasions alluded to with the word “exo” (meaning “outside”) (Emah & Omachonu, 2018). Exophoric reference involves contextual cues that require interpretation by the listener or reader. Halliday and Hasan (1976) indicate that the specific information needed to understand these references is not provided within the text but is inferred from shared knowledge between the reader and writer.

Since exophoric references retrieve information from outside the text based on situational context, they do not directly link the elements together, thus their understanding depends on the context. Sagrianti (2024) emphasises that understanding the meaning of exophoric references requires considering the situational context surrounding the text. The process involves the reader examining more than just the text and considering the shared environment between them and the writer.

Exophoric reference is divided into two types: homophora and deixis. Homophora refers to references in a text or conversation that depend on the listener's or reader's broader cultural knowledge for comprehension. As previously indicated, discourse analysis adopts a pragmatic perspective when examining how language is used. This approach addresses various aspects that are often overlooked in formal linguistic analysis of sentence structure and meaning.

Consequently, when analysing deictic references, discourse analysts need to take into account not only the prominent linguistic elements but also the background information necessary for their understanding, such as terms like “here”, “now”, “you” and “that”. Since the discourse analyst examines how language is used within specific contexts by speakers or writers, their primary focus is on understanding the connection between the speaker and the statement during its specific context of use, as opposed to the possible connections between sentences regardless of their context (Brown & Yule, 1983). The following phrases exemplify homophora:

- a) *The bible*: This term is commonly associated with Christianity, irrespective of the specific books of translation involved (Cruse, 2000).
- b) *The Constitution*: ‘The Constitution’ refers to the country's foundational legal document (Saeed, 2016).
- c) *The President*: This typically refers to the current sitting President, even without specifying a name (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Deixis is typically understood as the representation of the speaker's spatial, temporal context, and personal perspective in a statement. Words such as “I”, “here”, “now” and “this” heavily rely on context and indicate a focal point of awareness for the speaker (Al-Hindawi & Saffah, 2021). This view corresponds with Hadi's (2020) sentiment that exophora can be deictic, where specific words are employed to denote something within the interlocutors' context. Personal deixes involve pronouns that indicate the speaker, addressee and others such as “I”, “you”, “he” and “she” while spatial deixes relate to locations in space, using terms like “here” and “there”.

Temporal deixis concerns time references such as now, then and specific dates (Stapleton, 2017). On the other hand, spatial deixis refers to words that indicate location. Hadi (2020) notes that spatial deixis often functions exophorically, as distal (far) and proximal (near), for example, this, that, here and there. An example would be saying “that chair over there is John's”, while pointing to the chair in question. In the example, “Did the gardener water those plants?” “those” points to a previous mention of those specific plants in the conversation.

Conversely, endophoric references refer to anything within the text; they can be anaphoric, referring to the previous text, or cataphoric, referring to the subsequent text. Emah and Omachonu (2018) indicate that the most prevalent cohesive device in texts is a backward reference to something previously addressed. This specific type of reference is known as anaphora. On the same notion, Nordquist (2020) states that in English grammar, “anaphora” refers to the use of a pronoun or another linguistic element to refer back to a previous word or

phrase. The adjective form is “anaphoric” and this concept is also known as anaphoric reference or backward anaphora. A word that derives its meaning from a previously mentioned word or phrase is termed an anaphor. The preceding word or phrase that the anaphor refers to is known as the antecedent, referent, or head. The term “anaphora” originates from the Greek word meaning “carrying up or back.” As can be observed from the example below, the third-person pronoun “He” refers back to the proper noun “Michael” which is the antecedent in the previous sentence: “Michael went to the bank. *He* was annoyed because it was closed” (Camposn, 2019).

Another typical cohesive device is forward reference, often known as cataphora. Nordquist (2020) observes that cataphoric references occur when words or phrases serve as cues to information that will emerge later in the text. This strategy serves to build anticipation, connect and guide the reader or listener through the material being given. Whether in a novel, an article, or a speech, cataphoric reference can improve the overall flow and comprehension of the information. Cataphoric references use postcedents, as opposed to antecedents. However, cataphoric linkages are uncommon. This is illustrated by the example below adopted from Camposn (2019)

- d) Although I phone her every week, my *mother* still complains that I don’t keep in touch often enough

An observation that can be drawn from the example is that the third-person singular pronoun “her” mentioned earlier in the example refers to the noun “my mother”.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorise endophoric and exophoric references into three types: personal, demonstrative and comparative. Bahaziq (2016) points out that personal reference involves reference through the category of person within a speech situation or text. Personal references are widely used in conversations and writing. They are the most frequently used types of reference in everyday communication. Interlocutors may use them to point to objects, people and things. This category of personal reference encompasses three classes: personal pronouns, possessive determiners (adjective pronouns) and possessive pronouns. These entities can function as subjects and objects in sentences. Hadi (2020: 11) gave a detailed description of personal pronouns as portrayed in the table below:

**Table 2.1: Categories of Personal References**

<b>Person</b>	<b>Personal Pronoun</b>	<b>Possessive Adjective</b>	<b>Possessive Pronoun</b>
Speaker	I, Me	My	Mine
Addressee(s) with/ without other person (s)	You	Your	Yours
Speaker with other person(s)	We, Us	Our	Ours
Other person: Male	He, Him	His	His
Other person: Female	She, Her	Her	Hers
Other person: Object	Them, They	Their	Theirs
Object passage of text	It	Its	Its

Another form of reference is demonstrative reference, which is the use of pronouns to indicate the relative closeness or distance of an object or location to the speaker. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 57) state that “A demonstrative reference is essentially a form of verbal pointing. The speaker identifies the referent by locating it on a scale of proximity”. The use of determiners and adverbs in demonstrative reference produces cohesiveness. According to Hadi (2020), demonstratives serve as determiners or pronouns in grammar, indicating a certain noun or its alternative. English uses the following demonstratives: "this" and "these" for items that are near, and "that" and "those" for items that are farther away. "This" and "that" refer to singular items, while "these" and "those" are used for plural items.

On the contrary, comparative reference is a reference through resemblance. Halliday & Hasan (1976) observe that comparative reference enhances textual cohesion by establishing a contrast through adjectives, for example, same, identical and equal in a comparative degree. Bahaziq (2016) holds that comparative reference also contributes to textual cohesion through adverbs such as identically, likewise, so and such. The following examples by Witte and Faigley (1981: 192) demonstrate different types of references:

**e) Personal Reference**

1. At home, my father is himself. *He* relaxes and acts in *his* normal manner.

**f) Demonstrative reference**

2. We question why they tell us to do things. *This* is part of growing up.



### **g) Comparative Reference**

3. The older generation is often quick to condemn college students for being carefree and irresponsible. But those who remember their own youth do so *less* quickly.

#### **2.1.2 Conjunctions**

An additional element of cohesive tools primarily used in writing is conjunction. Conjunctions play a crucial role in linking clauses, sentences and paragraphs to create a cohesive text. They assist in demonstrating how various parts of a text are related to one another such as addition, contrast, cause and sequence. Conjunctive elements convey specific meanings that assume the existence of other parts within the discourse. There are five types of conjunctive cohesion: additive, adversative, causal, temporal and continuative, which help link the meaning of one sentence to the following one (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Additive conjunctions provide additional information and include words such as coordinating conjunctions “and” and conjunctive-adverbials “also” and “furthermore”. As noted by Bahaziq (2016), additive conjunctions link units that have similar meanings for example “No one wants to be rejected *and* to prevent rejection we change our behaviour often”

In contrast, adversative conjunctions - also referred to as connectives - are words or phrases used to link clauses or sentences by signalling contrast, opposition, or concession. Examples include terms like “but”, “however”, “yet”, “on the other hand” and “nevertheless” (Urmila, 2021). Here is an example of an adversative conjunction adapted from Liverny (2020: 25 ) “Tuti has done all of her tasks all day. She feels exhausted now. She feels tired *yet* she still cannot sleep”

Furthermore, other types of conjunctions are temporal conjunctions. Temporal conjunctions are used to indicate the timing of events, actions, or conditions, showing relationships in time between clauses or sentences (Genta, 2023). Examples of temporal conjunctions are: next, afterwards, finally and meanwhile as shown by the following example, “A friend of mine went to an out-of-state college *before* she left, she expressed her feelings about playing roles to win new friends”.

On the other hand, causal conjunctions establish connections between ideas or events, demonstrating cause-and-effect relationships. They connect reasons to their consequences or causes to their results. Common causal conjunctions include: because, so, therefore, thus, and as a result. The following examples by (Halliday & Hasan (1976: 256) demonstrate causal conjunctions:

- a) ...she felt that there was no time to be lost, as she was shrinking rapidly; *so* she got to work at once to eat some of the other bit.
- b) You aren't leaving are you? *Because* I've got something to say to you.

Additionally, conjunctions can be used as transitional words or phrases to enhance the coherence of a text. Transitional terms, such as however, because, therefore and in addition, are used to establish relationships between ideas, sentences and paragraphs. They act as indicators to show how the preceding idea, sentence, or paragraph relates to what comes next. According to Kildergaard (2018: 1), "paragraphs in a composition (as well as sentences in each paragraph) must have continuity if the reader is to follow the author's ideas easily. Therefore, transitions are important to establish a good flow for an essay".

Furthermore, transitions have meanings and students need to ensure that they choose transitions that are coherent with their writing. The following are examples of transitions adapted from Kildergaard (2018):

- Transitions for additional items: *added to this, equally important, first, second, third, and further.*
- Transitions for causal relations include: *accordingly, due to, as a result, because of and still.*
- Transitions for conditions are: *although, even though and in like manner.*
- Transitions for instances are: *for example, for instance and another.*

All these examples of transitions are used to form transitional phrases in paragraphs. However, Kildergaard (2018) warns against using too many transitions and indicates that overusing transitions can lead to distortion of the meaning, especially if a student or writer uses transitions inappropriately without paying attention to their meaning.

The previously discussed cohesive devices demonstrate that cohesion plays an important function in improving the quality of a text. Educators have spent years searching for effective methods to teach writing, particularly in ESL contexts. Abdissa and Kelemework (2014) view cohesion as a skill that teachers aim to impart to enhance writing proficiency as a nebulous concept that is challenging to teach and comprehend. Despite educators recognising cohesion and coherence as crucial for successful writing, their effective teaching remains elusive. Teachers praise its benefits, explain its importance and provide exemplary models, yet many students still struggle to write cohesively.

In the writing classroom, ESL teachers often discuss coherence in vague terms, without making a concerted effort to explain and teach it effectively. Teachers may make comments such as “Your writing is not coherent”; “It lacks unity”; “The concepts do not hang together”; or “It is disorganised.” Students sometimes do not know what those terms mean, because teachers would explain them vaguely (Lee, 2002). On that account, Witte and Faigley (1981) advise against prescribing coherent practices in discrete exercises. They argue that coherence conditions determined by the goal of the writer, the understanding and anticipation of the audience and the material to be delivered antagonise prescriptive methods to writing. Their examination of the limits of cohesiveness in evaluating student writing highlights the need to frame writing exercises within the context of the complete written material.

Despite the benefits of cohesion in writing, a persistent debate has emerged concerning the theory of cohesion. Traditionally, cohesion has been understood as the relationships that connect ideas to convey meaning to readers. However, this notion can be misleading, as learners may wrongly imagine that simply stringing sentences together would immediately make a cohesive document. John (1986) asserts that whereas Halliday and Hasan (1976) define coherent writing as having proper links between sentences, other current text analysis books have emphasised the “sticking to the point” aspect of cohesion. More importantly, they discuss the relationship of the points and prepositions to one another. The analysis includes the selection of coherent elements as well as other information structure features. For them, meaning is realised in prepositional relationships, which drive the text.

However, while published textbooks may enhance and improve recommendations, they fail to offer a sufficient overview of the depth and variety of coherence aspects necessary for effective writing. John (1986: 248) argues that:

A piece of writing is coherent when it elicits the response: ‘I follow you’; ‘I see what you mean’. It is incoherent when it elicits the response: ‘I see what you are saying here but what has it got to do with the topic at hand or what you told me above?’ These remarks, though true to the recent discussion of coherence as a phenomenon involving the interaction of the reader with text and as primarily a function of topic development, are not of much help to students who need more specific definitions and task-dependent exercises to produce prose judged to be coherent by experienced graders.

Additionally, as much as cohesion theory is important in writing, some scholars feel that Halliday and Hasan (1976) have, however, failed to include some coherent linkages within sentences. Sun (2020) asserts that their account of cohesion fails to generalise across environments to encompass structural and non-structural relationships. Halliday and Hasan (1976) do not distinguish between coherence inside a sentence achieved by grammatical structures and cohesiveness between and among sentences. Carrell (1982) also contends that too many links and ties may interfere with message comprehension, rendering the text incoherent. For this reason, cohesion alone is not always enough to make a text appear as a cohesive whole. This view also aligns with Morris and Hirst's (1991: 21) observation that "Cohesion is not a guarantee of unity in text but rather a device for creating it." Nonetheless, it is important to teach students how and when to use cohesive devices.

Although this study focuses on cohesive devices based on Halliday and Hasan's classification, other scholars have extended the scope of cohesion. Sun (2020) argues that tense markers, in addition to grammatical and lexical strategies, serve as indicators of cohesion. Sun emphasises the importance of lexical patterning and argues that lexical ties contribute significantly to text cohesiveness. Most cohesion studies are on lexis and research on cohesion in text, largely examines textual lexis patterns. Tense consistency helps maintain clarity and connection between ideas while grammatical devices like reference, ellipsis and conjunction enhance textual coherence. Lexical cohesion is achieved through related word choices such as synonyms and collocations. Together, these strategies ensure that texts are not only grammatically correct but also cohesive and coherent, facilitating better understanding for readers.

In addition, coherent relations should not be limited to the lexical and syntactic levels. Other functional categories can also contain cohesive linkages, such as semantic transitivity, syntactic theme-rheme structure and phonological intonations and sound patterns. Zein, *et al.* (2018) posit that semantic transitivity refers to the relationship between verbs and their arguments, influencing how meaning is constructed. By maintaining consistent transitive structures, writers can create clear connections between actions and participants, enhancing overall coherence. Context, pragmatic knowledge and syntactic theme should also be considered in the multilevel model of cohesion. Syntactic theme is the element of a sentence that the rest of the sentence is about, often appearing at the beginning. By strategically placing themes, writers can guide readers through arguments, narratives, establishing a clear focus and continuity. Phonological intimations involve the sound qualities of words, including alliteration, assonance

and rhythm. Sound patterns create a sense of unity and flow in a text. They can also evoke emotions or emphasise particular ideas, contributing to the overall coherence of the piece (Sun, 2020). Now that cohesion is a semantic relation, any semantic features can be regarded as cohesive devices if they can express semantic relations even if there is no formal correspondence.

Furthermore, some scholars argue that cohesion depends on the perspective of the writers, readers and the interlocutors. Dontcheva-Navratilova, Jančaříková, Miššíková, Povolná (2012) contend that cohesion is a literary feature that promotes coherence by guiding the reader through text processing. It should be noted that the interpretation of cohesive relations is both context-dependent and influenced by the reader's prior knowledge; thus, the relations established by various readers do not have to be identical.

Still on the notion of context, Widdowson (1978) maintains that cohesion is a locutionary act while coherence is an illocutionary one. Cohesion is a locutionary act involving the grammatical and lexical linking within a text that creates surface-level connections between sentences. It focuses on how words and phrases are used to maintain continuity and meaning in discourse. In contrast, coherence is considered an illocutionary act, as it pertains to the underlying meaning and logical relationships conveyed by the text. Coherence involves the reader's interpretation and understanding of how ideas relate to each other, transcending mere linguistic connections. Cohesiveness, therefore, has no effect on coherence. My point of view is that coherence cannot be achieved without cohesion. Thompson (2014) concurs with this view by stating that in most circumstances, the two are linked in the sense that work that effectively uses the cohesive resources of the language should be viewed as coherent. The next section reviews empirical studies conducted on grammatical cohesion which is the focus of this study.

## **2.2 Empirical Studies on Cohesion**

A critical analysis of studies in grammatical cohesion reveals important insights into how cohesive devices function in various writing contexts. In this section, the literature on studies conducted on grammatical cohesion is reviewed. Special emphasis is placed on studies conducted in the outer circle or ESL contexts, given that this study was conducted within an ESL context. As mentioned in Chapter One, this study aimed to explore grammatical cohesion in Grade 10 learners' academic texts at two selected schools in Maseru. Therefore, the next section presents studies on grammatical cohesion, particularly reference and conjunction as part of the scope of this study.

### 2.2.1 Reference

As previously indicated, reference is concerned with linking items and creating connections between words or ideas in a text. It is one of the cohesive devices that has attracted scholars' attention globally. Xin-hong (2007) investigated the application of English cohesion theory in the teaching of writing. The study used Masters students as participants. The findings reveal that personal references were extensively used while all other cohesive devices were rarely used. Students were asked to repeat the tasks several times yet not much progress was made on the cohesive devices.

Golparvar, Crosthwaite and Ziaecian (2024) examined the usages of cohesive devices in applied linguistics research articles, emphasising the role of references in enhancing clarity and coherence across different rhetorical sections. Their findings suggest that effective use of reference words significantly contributes to the overall readability of academic texts. The study highlights that strategic use of these devices not only aids in connecting ideas but also fulfills the communicative purpose of research articles, thereby improving reader comprehension.

Another significant study was conducted by Liverny (2020) at Universitas Islam Riau, focusing on grammatical cohesion in the thesis backgrounds of English Language Education students. This qualitative research adopted Halliday and Hasan's framework to analyse ten theses, identifying four types of grammatical cohesion: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. The study found that references (401 instances) were the most frequently used cohesive devices, while other cohesive tools were the least common. The total number of cohesive items identified was 771, indicating a strong reliance on reference to create cohesion in academic writing. Although Liverny's study was on cohesive devices in students' dissertations, it did not report on inappropriate usages of such devices. This is demonstrated in by the following examples extracted from Liverny (2020:33-34):

- a) Reading comprehension is the main aspect in *their* learning because the students need to be able to understand written texts.
- b) The students also have lack of interest in reading because *they* seem getting frustrated to understand their reading materials
- c) Undoubtedly, students of any language need to be able to read in *that* language.

In contrast, Abdurahman (2013) analysed grammatical cohesion in students' writing, revealing that reference was the predominant cohesive device, comprising 82.25% of the total cohesive elements used. The study focused on the grammatical cohesive devices present in the writing

of students from different educational contexts. Conducting a study in different contexts helps to make generalisations of the observed phenomena hence the present study was also conducted in different schools. The findings echoed those of Liferny's (2020) study, emphasising the dominance of reference in students' writing while highlighting the underutilisation of other cohesive devices.

On the other hand, Magogwe, Mokibelo, and Karabo (2023) examined cohesion and coherence in the written texts of University of Botswana students by applying Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy of cohesion and coherence to analyse their results. The study found that references were employed more often than other cohesive devices. Additionally, the study further examined inappropriate usages of cohesive tools. Issues identified in the students' essays included absent or improperly placed cohesive devices, as illustrated by the following example from one of the essays:

- d) Teenagers and young people today depend on the media for information about everything (missing) the latest gadget, fashion trends, the newest cars in the market, the best places to eat out in the country (missing) finding out (missing) their favourite celebrity is up to.

Another frequent issue was excessive repetition of references, as demonstrated by the following example, the pronoun "It" has been overused:

- e) *It* has allowed people.;.... *It* has created a platform;.... *It* makes for easy....

A limitation of their study is that due to the complexities of the cohesion and coherence aspects and oversight, not all cohesive elements and coherence aspects may have been discovered in the essays. These findings are similar to a study on the analysis of coherence and cohesion in students' written texts by Urmila (2021) which found that saliently used cohesive tools were reference and conjunction. However, in reference, students used subjective third-person singular pronoun "it" and the third-person plural pronoun "they," the third-person plural possessive adjective "their," the first-person plural possessive adjective "our" and the third person-singular pronoun "his." The students also used the demonstrative pronouns "this" and "those" and objective third-person pronouns "them" and "it." Urmila (2021) focused on identifying cohesive devices and their frequency of use. Similarly, the current study employed Halliday and Hasan's framework of cohesion, however, the attention was on identifying cohesive devices, frequency and inappropriate usage.

The findings of the previously analysed studies also align with the results in Tshotsho's (2006) study. To investigate writing strategies employed by black South Africans, Tshotsho (2006) also examined the use of reference devices "an", "the" and "a". Tshotsho (2006) observed that students do not use reference devices correctly. In the following examples, the reference "the" does not denote anything previously mentioned or anything that will be mentioned later in the text. "We are facing a big problem to South Africa because in *the* school that are on *the* rural area they are having a shortage of *the* tools like computers desk, books, and classroom. Some of the student traveling the long distance to go to school, because there is a limited school in South Africa."

Research on cohesive devices in Lesotho is limited. Hala-hala (2021) conducted a study focusing on the sociolinguistics of English in Lesotho, which included an examination of morphosyntax. The study revealed that article posed difficulties for both native and non-native English speakers specifically those marking exophoric reference, as they were used inconsistently in the analysed data. Issues with article usage included omissions, substitutions and insertions within sentences. Notably, zero articles were frequently observed, particularly the omission of the definite article "the" in specific situational contexts. This pattern was evident in both oral and written data, where the definite article or exophoric reference "the" was often missing, or the zero article was used instead. Entities such as institutional names and well-known public figures were assumed to be familiar to speakers and listeners, indicating a shared understanding in those contexts. While Hala-hala (2021) explored exophoric reference from a variationist linguistic perspective, the current study approached it through discourse analysis and pragmatics.

### **2.2.2 Conjunction**

Since the publication by Halliday and Hasan (1976), studies have been conducted on cohesion and coherence. The use of cohesive devices in English writing has been a notable topic of discussion. However, the effect of these devices on writing quality remained unknown. Therefore, Yingle and Xueai (2019) conducted research to investigate how effectively high school students employ cohesive devices in English writing. Their focus was specifically on the use of conjunctions. Their findings indicated that students frequently used conjunctions in their writing. However, despite their frequent use, many instances involve incorrect usage. One frequently misused conjunction was the coordinating conjunction "and," particularly in lower-rated compositions. In contrast, higher-rated compositions demonstrated nuanced use. Enhancements were moderately utilised because they ranked second in frequency at 37



instances (31%). This shows that students generally managed these conjunctions adequately, often connecting clauses meaningfully.

In addition, elaborative items were the least employed, appearing only four times (3% of all items), suggesting that students still struggled with using conjunctions for elaboration. In total, the study by Yingle and Xueai (2019) identified eleven cohesive conjunctions commonly used by students some of which include the following: then, as a result, because, after, and, also, but, in a nutshell, and even though. While their study provided insights into the patterns of conjunction use among high school students, it lacked a comprehensive explanation for those patterns.

Similar results were reported by Urmila (2021) regarding the systematic salient usage of the additive coordinating conjunction “and”. Urmila (2021) analysed the use of coherence and cohesion in students’ written texts. Her results on conjunctions revealed that students frequently used the additive coordinating conjunction “and” and “or.” For example, “Writing a journal helps you to reach your goal, learn from your experience *and* increase your confidence.” Most adversative conjunction types that were used by almost all the participants were the coordinating conjunction “but” and the conjunctive-adverbial “however”. Additionally, most causal conjunctions used by students were, “therefore,” “so” and “because”. Although students used conjunctions relatively well, not all cohesive devices were found in their writing. Therefore, Urmila (2021) suggests that lecturers at universities should encourage students to use cohesive tools properly in academic writing.

In contrast, Crossley and McNamara (2016) developed a “Tool for the Automatic Analysis of Cohesion (TAACO)” to assess the impact of cohesive devices on writing quality. Their findings demonstrated that while conjunctions and references are critical for establishing cohesion, their effectiveness varies depending on the general framework and complexity of the text. The study emphasises that cohesive devices must be used judiciously, as over-reliance on them can lead to redundancy and affect the flow of writing.

Kyle and Crossley (2018) explored the relationship between cohesive features, including conjunctions and references and writing quality in integrated and independent L2 writing tasks. Their results indicated that certain types of conjunctions, particularly causal and adversative conjunctions, were more predictive of writing quality than others. This finding suggests that not all cohesive devices have the same impact on text coherence, highlighting the need for writers to select conjunctions that best serve their argumentative goals. Similarly, Crosthwaite

and Jiang (2021) investigated the use of reformulation markers in students' essays across various disciplines. Their research found that the frequency and types of conjunctions differed significantly by discipline, indicating that disciplinary conventions influence the use of cohesive tools. Their study emphasised the importance of context in understanding how conjunctions function as cohesive tools in academic writing.

Another study on the use of conjunctions was undertaken by Tshotsho (2006) in her analysis of coherence and cohesion. Her findings show that students used causal conjunctions inappropriately. For instance, in the sentence below, the subsequent clause joined by the coordinating conjunction "because" has no causal relationship with the preceding one.

- a) Education is very important in the world *because* [sic] every department coming from education every department coming from education. But the department of education is moving slowly than ather [sic] department *because* of the following reasons firstly and formost [sic] there are more students than teachers.

Furthermore, studies on black South Africans in English (BSAE) conducted by Tshotsho (2006) found that English generated by "speakers of the Bantu language" group frequently contained some misunderstanding with the employment of cohesive devices. The tests revealed that certain Black South African English speakers have an unrefined style for applying coherent devices. Mistakes caused by pupils included inappropriate use of cohesive devices example:

- b) "Economic growth will be improved by changing to capitalism. *However*, investment will grow."

Another error made by black students was mistakenly starting a sentence or paragraph with a conjunction. For instance:

- c) *However* the State-Owned Enterprises fail to recover, they are given money.

These examples show a misuse of transitional phrases hence necessitating continuous research to generate intervention strategies that help improve language usage.

In Lesotho, research on the role of conjunctions as cohesive devices is scarce. However, some cohesive aspects have been studied from different perspectives. Letsoela (2013) explored the improper usages of transitions by students at the National University of Lesotho from a metadiscoursal perspective. Her findings reflected inappropriate usages of transitions such as

using the wrong additive marker and using the transitional word *furthermore* even when there is no preceding clause as illustrated in the example below:

**d) 5.2.2 National Parks and other conservation areas**

Furthermore, national parks or nature reserves are other means through which they try to conserve medicinal plants and to promote scientific research.

Additionally, Letsoela (2013) found that the most common misuse of contrastive markers was repetition, specifically the use of *although* and *but* to show concession. Learners systematically used them together within the same sentence as shown in this example:

- e)** *Although* it was found that most of the farmers went to tertiary, *but* none of them undertook a course in dairy production.

Similar findings were reported by Letsoela and Matlosa (2022). They note that at the National University of Lesotho, learners made mistakes when using conjunctions in their writing. This was portrayed in their study of lexical and semantic errors. Their findings revealed that under the category of stylistics, which is concerned with repetition, under specification and translation errors, students would use a coordinating conjunction “and” to connect two words with similar semantic constructs while using one would have been enough. The following examples demonstrate:

- f)** This study has shown that the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching aids relies much on the *commitment and dedication* of the teacher.
- g)** The main *reason and purpose* for using these groups of people was finding views, relationships, and concerns about...

Letsoela and Matlosa (2022) therefore concluded that while completing students majoring in English were expected to generate texts without errors, this did not apply to the National University of Lesotho students. They suggested that strict teaching methods should be implemented by offering mandatory first-year academic communication and study skills courses and remedial grammar classes, to establish a strong background for students. Choosing inappropriate conjunctions can make a text redundant and incohesive, therefore, students must be familiar with conjunctions as one of the cohesive devices. The study's weakness is that it was undertaken in a single institution, making its conclusions not generalisable.

The comparative analysis of these studies reveals consistent findings that highlight the dominance of reference and conjunction as cohesive devices across various contexts. This

suggests that it would be valuable to explore whether similar results could be found in Lesotho. Most of the cohesion studies conducted in Lesotho have focused on higher education institutions, so broadening the research to include high schools could greatly enhance the understanding of cohesion in Lesotho and globally. Additionally, most of these studies have employed the cohesion theory proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Adopting the same theoretical framework in a different context could provide deeper insights into the complexities of cohesion in both academic and literary writing. Therefore, addressing the gaps in the use of cohesive devices and improving instructional strategies has the potential to significantly enhance students' writing skills across various contexts.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

Scholars have deemed cohesion as the tool needed to enhance the standard of writing in schools. This chapter has discussed cohesion theory which underpins this study. The chapter has not only dealt in detail with grammatical cohesion, but it has also explored the impact of the theory on writing. Moreover, the chapter has reviewed empirical studies in different geographical locations and the findings revealed that cohesion is a necessary but often overlooked concept in schools. Therefore, there was a dire need for this study to be conducted in schools in Lesotho as it may help improve students' performance in English Language. The next chapter outlines the research design and methodology used for collecting data in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the design and methodology of the study, organised into seven main sections. Section 3.1 provides a broad overview of Lesotho, including its educational background and language situation, which serves as the research setting for the study. Section 3.2 details the qualitative research approach that underpins the study. Followed by Section 3.3 which discusses the sampling methods and techniques employed. Section 3.4 explores the data collection methods, including interviews, observations and content analysis. Next, Section 3.5 addresses the ethical considerations relevant to the study. Section 3.6 focuses on data analysis, and the chapter concludes in Section 3.7 with a summary of the key points discussed.

#### 3.1 Research Context

This study was carried out in high schools in Maseru, Lesotho. Thus, before delving into the research design, sampling and ethical considerations of the study, the historical and educational system of Lesotho is explored. The language situation in Lesotho – which is the context of this research – is also discussed.

##### *3.1.1 Historical and Geographical Background of Lesotho*

Lesotho, previously known as Basutoland, was initially sparsely inhabited by Bushmen until the late 16th century. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, the region experienced colonisation by refugees fleeing tribal conflicts from neighbouring areas. These newcomers coalesced into a relatively homogeneous cultural entity known as the Basotho tribe. Moshoeshe I, a tribal leader from the north, unified various Basotho tribes in 1818, who had previously been scattered by attacks from Zulu and Matabele forces. During his reign from 1823 to 1870, a series of conflicts with South Africa led to significant territorial losses. Seeking assistance, Moshoeshe I appealed to Queen Victoria, resulting in Basutoland coming under British protection in 1868. Under the British administration, efforts were focused on resolving disputes, maintaining the paramount chief's authority through indirect rule and resisting South African attempts to integrate Basutoland into the Union of South Africa (United States Department of Public Communication Editorial, 1987).

As the colonial era progressed, colonial administrations became more involved in providing education. According to Lesoli, Van Wuk and Van der Walt (2014), the involvement of these administrations ranged from subsidising missionary schools to starting their own schools.

While colonial officials used education to exert political control over the populace, indigenous people saw it as a method of self-improvement.

Lesotho achieved independence in 1966. Geographically, this South African enclave spans 30,355 square km. Lesotho has a largely mountainous fairly hostile environment and it has been traditional to split the country into four natural zones: the lowlands, the highlands, the Senqu or Orange River valley and the foothills. The lowlands are a thin strip along the western border of the country holding the capital, Maseru, most of the big towns and having the best infrastructure. The foothills are a thin strip to the east of the lowlands. The Senqu or Orange River valley is a narrow protrusion from the south and the highlands cover the vast majority of the surface area.

### ***3.1.2 Education System and Language Situation of Lesotho***

The Missionaries built the first regular schools in Lesotho in 1838. The lasting impact of missionary education is still apparent today, with churches overseeing and managing 90% of schools, while the government and other private entities manage the remaining 10%. The three primary churches involved are the Roman Catholic Church, the Lesotho Evangelical Church, and the Anglican Church of Lesotho. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) sets the curriculum used in schools. While Lesotho has always been a homogeneous nation, for example, 99.7% of the population speak Southern Sotho [*Sesotho sa Moshoeshoe*] as their native language, the western influence is increasingly obvious, especially among the middle class (Lesoli, Van Wuk & Van der Walt, 2014).

Additionally, Ngcobo, Makumane and Masala (2023) state that Lesotho became a bilingual country after gaining independence from Britain in 1966. Both the native language, Sesotho, and the coloniser's language, English, were recognised as official languages. Even though other local languages have been consolidated during the Lifaqane wars, according to Monyane (2009), there are still remnants of other language groups such as Tlokwa, Baphuthi and Nguni-speaking people. Their identity still largely dominates the areas of Quthing and Butha-Buthe.

After obtaining independence, Lesotho came up with policies that met the needs of its people, such as the language policy. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (2008):

Lesotho Constitution states that Sesotho and English are the two official languages and in recognition of the fact that there are other languages besides Sesotho and English, the mother tongue will be used

as a medium of instruction up to class 3 while English will be taught as a subject at this and other levels. From Grade 4, English shall begin to be used as a medium of instruction and to be taught as a subject as well. English shall cease to be an impediment to further learning and success. Sign language and its use in the teaching and learning processes shall form an integral part of the new Language policy in order to ensure access to information and effective communication.

English is the instructional language in Lesotho from primary schools through to institutions of higher learning. This has led many parents to prioritise their children's fluency in English over Sesotho, due to the perceived economic advantages associated with English globally. According to the Constitution, English is used in various public domains in Lesotho (Halahala, 2021). Other post-colonial languages such as French, Chinese and Spanish are also taught in schools and this fosters multilingualism and recognises Lesotho's multi-cultural heritage (Ngcobo, Makumane & Masala, 2023).

The brief language situation described above shows the significance of language both as a means of communication and a tool to access educational and career opportunities. This suggests the need to constantly review not just policies related to language but also aspects of its use to empower users to attain higher standards of communication. This current study therefore makes a contribution to ensure adherence to grammatical cohesion among English language users in an ESL context.

### **3.2 Research Design and Methodology**

The research design and methodology for this study are primarily grounded on the tenets of qualitative research methods, which include human participants as the subjects of analysis. McKinley (2020) points out that a research design pertains to the framework of the study, serving as a blueprint for shaping the content of the research project. Qualitative research design is used in social sciences and other disciplines to explore phenomena through non-numerical data.

In addition, qualitative research design is based on the constructivist worldview. Constructivism, or social constructivism (often integrated with interpretivism), is generally regarded as a qualitative research approach where individuals strive to comprehend the world they inhabit and operate within. Creswell and Creswell (2018: 46) state that "the goal of this type of research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being

studied. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings.”

Additionally, at the core of qualitative design lies epistemological principles, where a researcher’s epistemology fundamentally diverges from the positivist paradigm which emphasises the objective aspects of phenomena being studied, often represented by numerical data methods. McKinley (2020) asserts that post-positivism recognises an eternal reality that exists independently of human perception, but it acknowledges that our understanding of this reality is mediated through human interpretation and observation. Researchers aim to uncover these underlying realities while acknowledging that their observations are subjective and fallible (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Furthermore, one effective method for conducting qualitative research is ethnography. According to Creswell (2009), ethnography involves studying an entire cultural group in its natural environment over an extended period, mainly through observation and interviews. This research approach is adaptable and often changes based on the experiences encountered in the field. Qualitative research aims to explore human experiences within specific contexts, integrating various epistemological views, research methods and interpretive techniques. Language assessment is closely connected to the context, culture and values of the environment in which it is applied (Rahman, 2017).

Moreover, in qualitative research, the data collected from participants is non-numeric. Taherdoost (2021) indicates that qualitative data manifests as words or sentences. It does not only encompass nominal data but also descriptive non-numeric data that cannot be quantified. This kind of data addresses questions about “how” and “why” in research and unstructured data collection methods such as interviews are commonly used to address research questions about feelings, perceptions and emotions. Researchers employ a variety of approaches to collect this data, including audio recordings, sketches, notes and photographs.

While using qualitative data requires a significant investment of money and effort, the results may not be generalised, that is, the case findings can be applied to just the same challenges as general patterns from other studies. However, qualitative data is beneficial for collecting in-depth data to explore and uncover new effects and consequences of research programs, eventually enhancing the quality of numerical data (Taherdoost, 2021).



Additionally, qualitative approaches include three basic categories: observations, document reviews and in-depth interviews. This study employed various methods and data analysis tools as well as sampling techniques; this is referred to as triangulation in research. In qualitative research, triangulation means using several techniques or data sources to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomena. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stipulate that triangulation is also considered a qualitative research approach to test validity through the “convergence” of information from various sources. This study employed various methods, data analysis tools and sampling techniques. This triangulation helped to answer the research questions and address the objectives.

Qualitative research design is coherent with studies on cohesion. Takriyanti, Chaniako and Hamdan (2021) used a qualitative research design in their study. They state that the qualitative research method is ideal for research on cohesion because it embeds cultural aspects such as power and distance thus permitting the researcher to examine a small data thoroughly. They used documentation and tests as data collection techniques. Liferny’s (2020) research also relied heavily on qualitative analysis of written texts. While the present study is predominantly qualitative, it is supplemented by quantitative data for emphasis. Therefore, motivated by the advantages of the qualitative paradigm, I have employed it in this study.

### **3.3 Sampling**

Having examined the educational background and language situation in Lesotho, this section investigates the sampling methods applied in the study, using sampling frameworks from text linguistics, given that cohesion is a sub-field of this discipline. Before delving into sampling techniques, the concept of sampling will be defined. According to Sharma (2017), sampling is a method that researchers use to systematically select a relatively small, representative group of items or individuals from a larger population for observation or experimentation, in line with the study’s objectives. Various sampling methods can be used to draw a sample from a population. In this study, sampling techniques were employed to select a sample from the population.

A population refers to the total group or members of a defined group that possess specific traits that interest the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) posit that the population comprises subjects with knowledge of the issue or problem under study. A sample can be selected from the population using sampling techniques.

In qualitative research, sampling methods can be categorised into random or probability sampling and non-random or non-probability sampling. According to Showkat (2017), probability sampling refers to any sampling technique in which the probability of selecting each individual is the same or predictable, allowing it to be changed mathematically. Random sampling techniques require more effort but are far more accurate whereas the non-random sampling approach is entirely based on judgement. Non-random sampling techniques are commonly used in qualitative research due to the focus on depth and richness of data rather than representativeness. While there are numerous sampling procedures, for this study non-random sampling techniques – convenient sampling and purposive sampling – were considered because they are coherent with cohesion and coherence studies as described below.

### ***3.3.1 Convenience Sampling***

In qualitative research, convenience sampling entails using a sample that is readily available and within the researcher's access or reach. It can apply to nearly any research. However, the term is only used if the researcher's primary concern in selecting a sample was the availability of volunteers and they were unable to choose from a wide range of communities and research sites. Although it may also be critiqued for selection bias due to variances in the target population, convenience sampling is a time-efficient approach to gathering data from participants who are free and willing to engage in the research. Convenience sampling is a non-random sampling technique (Golzar, Noor & Tajik, 2022).

As such, researchers seeking to study coherence and cohesion have used convenience sampling for various reasons. Khalil, Abu-Ayyash and Salhieh (2022) used convenience sampling to analyse the lexical cohesion of 30 twelfth-graders essays. This sampling technique was aimed at specifically answering the research questions: "Is there any correlation between the total number of lexical cohesion devices used and the quality of writing?" "Is there any relation between specific types of lexical cohesion devices used and the quality of writing?" On the other hand, Magogwe, Mokibelo and Karabo (2023) employed convenience sampling to select participants for their study as a class taught by one of the authors was chosen solely for convenience, without any other specific reason.

Therefore, with the advantage of accessibility and reach of the participants befitting the desired goal of my research, for this study, I employed convenient sampling to investigate grammatical cohesion in written texts of Grade 10 students at two high schools in Maseru. All the two schools were not only within reach at minimum costs but also taught English as a second language which was convenient for this study.

### ***3.3.2 Purposive Sampling***

Premised on the qualitative design, purposive sampling refers to sampling methods that depend on the researcher's opinion in picking the units to be researched (Sharma, 2017). Judgmental sampling is compatible with text linguistics studies because it selects participants who are most relevant to the research questions. This tailored approach guarantees that the data collected is substantial and closely aligned with the study's objectives, leading to more significant and targeted findings.

Additionally, purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research when the goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon rather than making statistical generalisations, or when dealing with a small and specific population. When applied appropriately, purposive sampling helps researchers eliminate irrelevant responses that do not align with the study's context. Although this method may exclude some important subgroups, leading to potential sampling bias and uneven research outcomes, it can also decrease the margin of error in data collection by ensuring that the data sources are well-suited to the research setting (Obilor, 2023).

Purposive sampling is frequently used by researchers in cohesive studies. Hatasuhut and Hafizh (2021) used purposive sampling techniques to select 24 reviews of related theories from different thesis proposals in order to determine the students' ability to create coherence. The thesis proposals were selected by using the purposive sampling technique because they belonged to students who had conducted their thesis proposal seminar. Liyana (2014) used purposive sampling intending to find out the use and misuse of cohesion and coherence from three students' theses. However, the reason for selecting purposive sampling in Liyana's research was rather vague for Obilor (2023) argues that a successful purposive sample must have explicit criteria and justification for inclusion. This study used purposive sampling to select the participants who use English as a second language. More details on the selection of the sample and the context are discussed in the next section.

### ***3.3.3 The Research Site and Sample***

Ideally, the entire population would be considered in this research, but it was not possible due to time constraints. The population of the current study were students from two high schools in Maseru which are School A and School B and teachers from both schools. In this case, sampling techniques were used to choose a sample. A sample represents a portion of the population. To conduct statistical analysis, a sample must be representative of the population and sufficiently large. A sample is used to improve accessibility, lower costs and save time for

researchers to conduct studies on participants from the community. The results can then be utilised to draw conclusions applicable to the full population (Obilor, 2023).

Thus, in cases where sample A is chosen, it must be the right size that can represent the entire population to make findings credible. Andrade (2020) asserts that it is impossible to research the entire population, thus studies are undertaken on samples instead. Sample results should be generalisable to the entire population and in certain situations, the future. Thus, the sample should represent the population.

Using a larger sample size can improve population representation and the accuracy of results. However, beyond a specific number, the increase in accuracy becomes negligible and thus not worth the work and expenses incurred. On the other hand, a small sample size may result in insufficient statistical power to answer the primary research question, leading to a statistically non-significant result. Additionally, a small sample size may inconvenience participants in the study, without benefiting future research and this is not ethical (Andrade, 2020). Patton (2002) recommends that depending on the study's goal and stakeholder's interest, qualitative research sample sizes should be adequate to encompass the examined occurrences. However, it is essential to emphasise that having the appropriate population is far more important than the size of the sample. Thus, the right size for this study is not merely a large one but the one which has the linguistic aspects to be studied.

The research sample for this study covered a research site involving human participants from two high schools in Maseru. The sample comprises of teachers and students. Observed as part of the ethical concerns, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, both the teachers and their schools were assigned the following pseudonyms: School A which is a government school and School B an Evangelical Mission school. The target group for this study was 30 Grade 10 students from each school who were assumed to be 15-20 years old and 10 teachers (5 from each school). The teachers had 6-30 years of teaching experience.

The students were deemed a suitable target group for this study because they had been taught how to read and write for 10 years. In primary school, students are taught how to write compositions and read for meaning to enhance their writing skills. Although the Ministry of Education and Training abolished formal primary leaving examinations in previous years, in a bid to augment teaching and learning, which is believed to have been negatively affected by this leading to a decline in the performance of students; students will start writing examinations

again from 2024. According to circular number six of 2024 written by the Examinations Council of Lesotho (Ecol) (2024), the following changes would be made:

1. Listening and speaking tests are to be introduced in English and Sesotho. This will be a school-based assessment and the marks will contribute to the final grade.
2. Composition and comprehension will be brought back to instil reading and writing skills.
3. The results will be published and communicated nationally around December.
4. Assessments will be written early to allow Ecol to process the results in time for publication.

In Grades 8, 9 and 10, students delve into more advanced writing skills in preparation for Grade 11 where they write tasks including compositions, directed writing and comprehension as part of their English Language exams. Age and gender were not essential factors for this study because the main focus was on written practices. Although both schools teach English as a second language and use it as a medium of instruction as per the policy framework in Lesotho, looking at the past ten years the selected government school has been one of the top-performing schools in the country while the evangelical school was just an average school. They are both located in Maseru, the capital city and they are both co-educational schools.

Motivated by the previously discussed sampling techniques, I used purposive sampling to select the schools. I also used it to select the participants for the study. In School A, the 10 best-performing students were selected in each class as the classes were divided into three categories. Grade 10A had high-performing learners, Grade 10C had intermediate learners and Grade 10E had the least performing. The purpose of this was to have a mixed-ability sample. In School B 30 Grade 10 students with mixed abilities were selected from different classes. Five teachers from each school were purposively selected because of their occupation and experience as English language practitioners.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

The data collection techniques for this study were based on the principles of the qualitative paradigm. Patton (2015) states that data collection in qualitative research involves gathering non-numerical. Boslaugh (2007) distinguishes between two types of data: primary data and secondary data. Primary data consists of original, unpublished information that remains unaltered by others. Researchers use different techniques to gather and collect this type of data

for specific objectives. Consequently, primary data is generally more valid, reliable, dependable, objective and authentic compared to secondary data (Taherdoost, 2021).

Validity in research refers to research that is well-grounded and justifiable. Reliability refers to the repeatability or replication of research findings. Drost (2011: 114) states that “validity is the meaningfulness of research components,” while Creswell (2014) refers to validity as the degree to which the data accurately reflects the concept it is supposed to measure. High validity ensures that the research findings are true representations of the phenomena being studied. High validity means the data correctly captures the subject matter ensuring that the conclusions are sound.

On the other hand, high reliability means that if the study was repeated under the same conditions, similar results would be obtained. Similar to reliability, dependability focuses on the stability of data over time. High dependability indicates that the data remains consistent under varying conditions and is not subject to random errors or changes. Authenticity means that the data has been collected honestly and transparently. High authenticity means the data accurately reflects the reality of the research context and has not been manipulated (Bryman, 2012). These aspects will be discussed in detail in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

These characteristics are significant in certain research methodologies, like statistical surveys, where the information is specific to a topic and not available from published sources. Therefore, while secondary data can be used, a reliable conclusion requires the inclusion of primary data as secondary data is often modified by others. Employing primary sources ensures high-quality data, enhances findings and allows the researcher to incorporate additional information as needed throughout the research process. Thus, several triangulated primary data collection techniques were used in this study as discussed in the sections below.

### ***3.4.1 Interviews***

Interviews are well-known methods for gathering qualitative data. The goal of a qualitative research interview is to add to conceptual and theoretical knowledge of the research based on the meanings that interviewees attribute to their life experiences. Patton (2015) notes that qualitative interviews are often classified in various ways, with many modern texts broadly distinguishing them as unstructured, semi-structured, or structured. Structured interviews are highly structured with a predetermined set of questions. The interviewer sticks closely to the script, ensuring consistency across interviews. Structured interviews are mainly used when comparing responses across a large number of participants.

On the other hand, semi-structured interviews blend a set of predetermined questions with the flexibility to delve into topics that arise during the conversation. The interviewer follows the guide but can probe deeper based on the participants' responses. Semi-structured interviews are mainly used when seeking both consistency and depth of information. Additionally, they are typically structured around a set of pre-established open-ended questions, with additional questions arising from the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee(s). Semi-structured in-depth interviews are the most commonly used format in qualitative research and can be conducted either with individuals or groups (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015).

Furthermore, with semi-structured interviews, the open-ended character of the questions specifies the issue under examination while simultaneously allowing the interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in greater depth. Kvale and Brinkman note that (2015) if the interviewee has difficulties answering a topic or provides a brief response, the interviewer can use clues or prompts to encourage the interviewee to think about it further. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer might additionally push the interviewee to comment on the original response or pursue a line of inquiry initiated by the interviewee.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews help to establish a relaxed and free environment for both the interviewer and the interviewee. The conversational nature of semi-structured interviews helps build rapport between the interviewer and the participant, leading to more honest and open responses. Participants also feel more engaged in a semi-structured interview because they can express their views in their own words and discuss what is important to them. Semi-structured interviews can also be adapted to various research contexts and populations making them a versatile tool for gathering qualitative data (Bryman; 2016; Galetta, 2013; Kvale & Brinkman, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews are predominantly used in cohesion studies. Insofar as these interviews are concerned, Magogwe, Mokuedi, Mokibelo, Karabo and Sethunya (2018) selected ten students from each class for convenience to gain an overview of the cohesive devices they employed in their essay writing and their experiences in using them. Even though they did not specify the type of interviews they used, they did yield the desired results as students' responses corroborated their research findings. Therefore, inspired by the advantages of semi-structured interviews, I deemed them most appropriate for the present study.

Thus, with the benefits of interviews put forward, rich oral data was obtained from teachers from both schools as they were in a relaxed environment. In School A the interviews were held in the teachers' staff room. The teachers chose the venue because they felt more comfortable in that environment. However, I suggested that we have one-on-one sessions in a secluded corner of the same venue so that they could feel free to express themselves without fear of what others may think and without any disturbances. In School B, the interviews were held in the Librarian's office because it was private and comfortable. Another reason was that face-to-face conversations could be held without interference and fear of judgement from others and to encourage the interviewees to communicate freely in a relaxed manner. Each interview lasted for ten minutes or less. The teachers in each school were given the same interview questions, however, the aim was not to compare but to learn the factors that affect the students' learning of the English language from their experiences and to see if some of those factors are reflected in students' texts. Another data collection method used together with interviews in this study is discussed in the next section.

#### ***3.4.2 Diagnostic Tests***

A diagnostic test in education is designed to identify a learner's strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, skills and areas for improvement in a specific subject area. Alderson (2005) observes that unlike formative or summative assessments, which measure overall performance, diagnostic tests aim to uncover specific gaps in learning that can inform targeted instructional strategies and interventions. Diagnostic examinations are intended to identify both a learner's language knowledge and proficiency. Focusing on strengths allows for identifying a learner's current level, whilst focusing on shortcomings or potential areas for progress should result in remediation or additional training. As such, diagnostic tests should allow for a complete analysis and evaluation of task replies, as well as provide actionable feedback.

Furthermore, diagnostic tests do not only help teachers identify specific areas where students struggle, but they also allow for personalised and effective teaching strategies. These tests can detect learning difficulties and gaps early, enabling timely intervention before they become more significant. Even though diagnostic tests focus on one specific area of knowledge and may not capture broader learning issues or contextual factors affecting student performance, they can help a researcher study a problem in detail.



Diagnostic assessments also help provide a baseline for measuring student progress over time, which can be motivating for students and teachers (McMilliam, 2017).

I employed a diagnostic test similar to that employed by Abdelwahab and RahmtAllah (2020) to investigate cohesion and coherence in students' writing. Unlike the study by Abdelwahab and RahmtAllah (2020) where participants were unaware of the study's focus, participants in this study were informed. In Genta's (2023) study, similar to the current research, a diagnostic test was employed where students were instructed to complete a test within a 45-minute timeframe. Unlike the present study, participants in Genta's research were permitted to use dictionaries and other reference materials. In the current study, students were not allowed to use dictionaries because the study aimed to assess the participants' natural ability to construct cohesive texts without relying on external aids. Allowing access to dictionaries or other references could distort the findings by masking participants' actual understanding and proficiency in these linguistic aspects.

Secondly, as noted by DeVellis (2017), maintaining consistency in testing conditions is important for ensuring the validity and reliability of the research results. Allowing some participants to use dictionaries while others cannot may introduce variability and bias into the data, undermining the study's ability to draw accurate conclusions about the participants' abilities and the factors influencing cohesion.

Furthermore, drawing from previous exam papers, students were tasked with writing compositions and directed writing. Therefore, I devised tasks for teachers to select from, depending on the syllabus topics covered up to that point. In School A, the teachers chose composition writing whereas in School B, they chose directed writing; speech writing to be specific. Both tasks were grounded in these principles.

- To avoid making participants feel constrained, they were allowed to select two out of three topics.
- Participants received instructions to clarify the task and help them stay on track.

The time allocated to participants to complete the test was 45 minutes. This was done on the basis that each period at school takes 40 minutes as such the researcher asked for an additional time of five minutes. However, the Examinations Council of Lesotho (2023) states that in examinations, the standard writing time for Paper One which comprises written tasks such as compositions and directed writing in Lesotho is one hour and forty

five minutes (45 minutes for each task). The length of tasks should be a page and a half. Hence, the students were instructed to write compositions and speeches that were one page and a half long.

### ***3.4.3 Documentary Sources: Written Data***

To collect data on written texts and oral data, content analysis was used in the present study. Content analysis is a robust data collection tool, particularly beneficial for studying coherence and cohesion in texts. Content analysis is one of the most used analytical tools today. It has been used in different qualitative research settings. Qualitative content analysis focuses on conducting a thorough assessment of speech or text by considering the surrounding context. This type of analysis goes beyond simply counting words or extracting explicit information from the texts. Instead, it aims to investigate the underlying meanings, themes and patterns, whether they are obvious or more subtle. Through qualitative content analysis, researchers can gain an understanding of social reality in a subjective yet rigorous manner (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009).

Additionally, content analysis can be applied to different types of textual data such as written texts, transcripts of spoken discourse and across different media, making it a versatile tool for examining coherence and cohesion. Neuendorf (2017) states that content analysis provides both quantitative and qualitative insights such as the frequency of cohesive devices and contextual understanding of coherence, offering a comprehensive view of how coherence and cohesion are constructed in texts. By coding and categorising textual elements, content analysis can reveal patterns and trends over time or across different texts, providing insights into how coherence and cohesion evolve or differ in various contexts.

Zhang and Wildermuth (2009: 20) further elaborated that “qualitative content analysis originated mainly in the fields of anthropology, qualitative sociology and psychology.” The purpose was to study the meanings conveyed through physical messages. The core approach of qualitative content analysis is inductive in nature. The data itself serves as the basis for identifying topics and themes, as well as deriving conclusions from them. In some instances, qualitative content analysis aims to develop a new theory (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009)

Moreover, qualitative content analysis aims to enhance understanding and insight into the research phenomenon. This approach, which involves using language and contextual

cues to derive meaning within the communication process, requires a detailed examination of the content collected through interviews or observations. There are three main methods of qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed and summative (Assarroudi, Nabavi, Armat, Ebadi & Vaismoradi, 2018).

In conventional coding analysis, categories are created directly from the text data. Conversely, directed content analysis starts with a theory or existing research findings to guide initial coding. Summative content analysis emphasises counting and comparing elements, such as keywords or content and then interpreting the underlying context. While content analysis is akin to documentation analysis, the key distinction is that content analysis encompasses all forms of media containing words, whereas documentation analysis is limited to written documents (Krippendorff, 2018). Consequently, content analysis was employed in this study to analyse both oral data from interviews and written data from the diagnostic test

Urmila (2021) used document analysis to collect participants' writings as documents while in Takriyanti, Chaniako and Hamdan's (2021) study the documentation was used to get the information such as the research place, organisation structure, students' activities, students' worksheets and documents. The qualitative textual data of this research was collected from students' written tasks on directed writing and creative writing which were then analysed for grammatical cohesion devices.

### **3.5 Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability in research establish trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a fundamental ethical consideration in qualitative research. Trustworthiness entails the extent to which the research process and results are reliable, credible and valid. Validity refers to how well a study accurately represents or evaluates a specific concept. It is not only one of the most fundamental aspects of a sound research methodology but is also crucial in ensuring that research outcomes are believable and can be used with confidence to inform decisions or further research (DeVellis, 2017).

In general, qualitative research often must meet rigorous standards to ensure trust in its findings. According to Williams and Kimmons (2022), these standards aim to accurately represent the studied population and demonstrate consistent methodology over time. This rigour is defined through four key elements in qualitative studies: credibility,

transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research findings. These elements are discussed below.

### ***3.5.1 Transferability***

Transferability denotes the extent to which the results can be generalised or applied to different settings or situations. Ahmed (2024: 2) states that “thoroughly describing the research context, participants and methods allows readers to evaluate the similarities between their context and the study, enabling them to judge the applicability and relevance of findings to their own settings or situations”. Ahmed (2024) further adds that providing details on sample and participant selection criteria will help determine if the findings apply to other groups or circumstances. In the present study, the research context is described in detail and the sample, sampling techniques and participants are also described thoroughly.

### ***3.5.2 Dependability***

Dependability refers to the consistency of data over time and under various conditions. It measures how well the chosen methods and sources of data collection produce the necessary information, such that a similar study conducted in a different context using the same methods would yield comparable results. Thorough documentation of each research step enhances transparency, enabling others to replicate the study, evaluate the reliability of the findings and comprehend the reasoning behind the decisions made (Ahmed, 2024). Every step of the research process in this study has been documented including data collection methods, sampling and sampling techniques and tools used to analyse data.

### ***3.5.3 Confirmability***

Confirmability is a key principle in establishing trustworthiness, referring to the level at which the findings are influenced by the respondents rather than by the biases or interests of the researcher. This principle includes obtaining feedback from peers or experts through peer debriefing and conducting member checks. Member checking ensures that findings correctly reflect participants' viewpoints and experiences. This process can help validate interpretations, minimise personal biases, introduce alternative perspectives, and affirm the authenticity of the findings. Additionally, confirmability encompasses reflectivity, which involves considering the researcher's impact on the research (Stahl & King, 2020). Thus, to ensure confirmability of the results, the participants were recorded during the interviews and in cases where their responses were written down, they were

asked to confirm if they did say what was written. Input from peers was sought during the research process especially from experts in the same field to ensure confirmability of the results.

#### ***3.5.4 Credibility***

Credibility pertains to the trust in the accuracy of the findings. In Stahl and King's (2020: 26) view, "one method of promoting credibility is through the numerous processes of triangulation...triangulating means using several sources of information or procedure from the field to repeatedly establish identifiable patterns." This study used several types of triangulations, including methodological triangulation, which involves using multiple methods for data collection or analysis. Additional data collection techniques employed in this research include interviews, content analysis, and diagnostic tests.

Although credibility is an important aspect of research, it is hard for the findings of a qualitative study to be credible as opposed to those of quantitative research. Ghafouri and Ofoghi, (2016: 1915) affirm that "qualitative studies are exposed to bias in reflection of data by the researcher. The reflection of research is the impact of his thoughts and attitude or impact of the research process on the participant and findings from the research." For Ahmed (2024), researchers can improve the credibility of their results and mitigate the influence of possible prejudices associated with using one method or data source by employing a range of data collection methods. Therefore, to bolster the credibility of this study, data was gathered from students' written compositions, speeches and interviews with teachers.

#### ***3.6 Ethical Considerations***

Ethical considerations are specific principles, regulations and standards of research-related behaviour that academics have determined are proper, suitable and fair. These principles are also referred to as "human subject protection" which refers to the guidelines researchers follow to make sure they protect the people they are studying (research participants). Each discipline has its ethical norms that are relevant to the type of research to be undertaken (Davis & Lachlan, 2017).

This study followed ethical guidelines set by the National University of Lesotho and the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Lesotho. Ethical considerations have also been considered throughout the research process, including planning, data collection and

analysis. Such ethical considerations observed in this study include informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, respect for persons and justice.

### ***3.6.1 Informed Consent***

Informed consent ensures that participants have a complete understanding of the research's purpose, the procedures they will undergo, any potential risks involved and their rights, including the ability to disengage from the study at any point. This process upholds the autonomy of participants. Davis and Lachlan (2017) emphasise the significance of informed consent in research, stating that individuals should receive information regarding the study, encompassing both the threats and advantages involved and be allowed to make their own decisions about whether to participate or not. The information must also be presented in a manner that is comprehensible to participants, taking into account their level of education and proficiency. Additionally, participation should be voluntary and without any form of coercion or undue influence. On that note, the participants in the present study were not forced or cajoled by any means to participate in this study and they were also told they could withdraw whenever they wanted.

### ***3.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity***

Protecting the privacy of participants is paramount. Researchers must ensure that personal information is kept confidential and when necessary, anonymised to prevent identification. Data should be stored securely and access should be limited to authorised personnel (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). Thus, when conducting fieldwork, in this study, the participating teachers and the school were assured of the study's confidentiality. They were also assured that they would remain anonymous thus pseudonyms for the schools and the participants have been used in this study. The data will also be ethically managed. Only with permission from the National University of Lesotho will the data be disclosed to the public or any person seeking it, during or upon completion of the study. Thus, the copies of the dissertation will be in my possession and of the supervisor, the Department of English at the National University of Lesotho and the National University of Lesotho's Library.

### ***3.6.3 Respect for Persons***

Furthermore, since this study used human participants, they were treated with respect and their traditions, values and norms were also respected. Beauchamp and Childress (2013) view respect for persons as a principle that involves recognising the autonomy and dignity of individuals and ensuring that their rights and welfare are prioritised in all

research activities. This can be done by honouring participants' decisions and preferences regarding participation by being culturally sensitive and observing the permission provided by the participants to be part of the study. Permission was requested from the management of the two respective schools that participated in this study. With the permission of the schools' principals, the study was conducted. Participants' preferences were also considered, for instance, some teachers did not like being recorded during interviews, hence, to respect their preferences their responses were written down.

#### ***3.6.4 Justice***

The principle of justice guarantees that the advantages and disadvantages of research are shared equally among the participants. Justice mandates that all participants are treated with respect and fairness during the research process. To promote fairness and inclusivity, this study employed triangulated sampling techniques.

#### ***3.6.5 Referencing***

To avoid plagiarism, the Harvard referencing style was followed in this study and sources of material used during and after the study have been acknowledged. References are used to give research work credibility; therefore, the Department of English at the National University of Lesotho advises students to use references in their academic projects.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

After data collection, both the spoken and written data were transcribed and analysed. For Vinitha (2019), qualitative data analysis aims to make sense of the numerous, diverse and mostly non-numeric material gathered throughout an investigation. In qualitative research, data analysis is a cyclical and intricate process aimed at revealing the underlying meanings people ascribe to their behaviours and responses in a given context. While there are tools for analysing qualitative data, the researcher remains the main tool for uncovering these meanings through close interaction with the data and the individuals sharing their experiences. Even though diverse procedures are proposed in different qualitative methods, qualitative data analysis includes preparing the data, coding, categorising and creating themes.

Therefore, after the data for this research was collected, an analysis of both spoken data from the interviews and written data gathered from the written tasks was done. In accordance with the objectives of this study, the written compositions and speeches were specifically analysed for grammatical cohesion. Cohesion was analysed by identifying

the following cohesive devices: reference and conjunction. They were assessed based on how frequently they appeared in every paragraph of the composition, including the introduction and conclusion. They were also analysed in terms of appropriate usage.

In addition, this study employed, thematic coding and content analysis as methods of qualitative research to analyse data. Majumdar (2019) notes that thematic analysis, which is a popular qualitative research method, gives a brief explanation and interpretation of a data set's themes and patterns. Thus, regardless of the theoretical framework, thematic analysis is a more adaptable, versatile and flexible research tool compared to other qualitative methodologies.

As a result, thematic analysis contributes to developing a rich, thorough and complicated account of the data set. The thematic analysis approach is characterised by very explicit and unambiguous standards for its implementation and these procedural guidelines lend scientific rigour to the procedure. However, Majumdar (2019) cautions that thematic analysis requires a high level of expertise and should not be used as a rigid, step-by-step, or inflexible approach to data analysis. It should instead be implemented in connection to the research question and data availability. The two methods are consistent with research in cohesive studies. Bahaziq (2016), Galegane (2008) and Magogwe, Mokibelo and Karabo (2023) used content analysis coupled with thematic analysis to analyse data.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the study's design and methodology. The chapter has not only discussed the study's location but also why it was chosen. It highlighted the judiciousness of the qualitative research design, particularly regarding sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Lastly, the chapter presented the ethical considerations followed during the research process, especially when collecting data. The succeeding chapter presents the data, followed by the analysis and discussion of the findings.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data followed by a discussion of the findings. One set of data was obtained from Grade 10 students' written tasks. The other set was from English Language teachers who shared their opinions and experiences on teaching English in an ESL context, specifically on factors that influence students' learning. Although the data presented in this chapter has quantitative aspects, it is predominantly qualitative. The data provided also addresses the following research questions and objectives that this study aimed to explore:

- What are the cohesive devices used in Grade 10 learners' academic texts?
- To what extent do Grade 10 students employ cohesive devices in writing?
- What could be the reasons for using such cohesive devices in their academic texts?

By addressing these research questions, the study achieved its specific objectives, as shown by the findings below, which lead to conclusions and form the basis for recommendations. Before delving into the findings, the demographic details of the participants are presented.

#### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

During the data collection process, information about the demographic traits of the research participants was obtained including their age, gender, occupation and educational background. This study comprises the data collected from 70 participants: 60 Grade 10 learners from two selected schools and 10 Grade 10 teachers from both schools. The data was collected from written compositions from School A and written speeches from School B. The demographic information is summarised in the table below.

**Table 4.1: Demographic Information of the Participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>
Teachers	30-50	Males and females	6- 30 years	English Language teachers	Tertiary
Students	15-20	Males and females	N/A	Students	Secondary (Grade 10)

## 4.2 Principles of Textuality

As previously shown in Chapter Two, the principles of textuality refer to the key terms that make a text coherent and meaningful. In the field of text linguistics, the emphasis is placed on identifying the seven principles that contribute to textuality. These principles include grammatical cohesion, which encompasses several mechanisms such as reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion espoused by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Understanding these principles allows individuals to assess whether a text is acceptable or not. Ultimately, every text strives to convey meaning which is achieved through coherence with cohesion playing a significant role in this process (Van De Poel, 2003). Considering the educational level of the students involved in this study, the analysis focused on references and conjunctions in their texts rather than on more complex cohesive devices like substitution and ellipsis. The findings from the data on the two principles of achieving cohesion are discussed below.

### 4.2.1 Reference

As stated earlier, reference cohesion is a form of grammatical cohesion where a specific linguistic unit points to other linguistic units that appear before and after it (Ermanto & Tahar, 2018). Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify references into two types: exophoric references (situational exophora) and endophoric (textual endophora).

#### 4.2.1.1 Exophoric Reference

Exophoric references were sporadically used in students' writing from both schools. The least used type of exophoric reference is temporal deixis with a frequency of 4% (4) followed by spatial deixis with 11 (15%). This suggests that students are not familiar with these types of references. This finding aligns with Cornish's (2022) view that students struggle with using exophoric references in their writing. The following table demonstrates the frequency of occurrences of exophoric references used by students from both schools: a total of 247 (10%) out of all the references (2, 394) were used by students from the two schools.

**Table 4.2: Frequency Distributions of Exophoric References**

Type of reference	School A	School B
Homophora	15 (25%)	62 (33%)
Temporal Deixis	2 (3%)	1 (1%)
Spatial Deixis	7 (11%)	4(2%)
Personal Deixis	37 (61%)	119 (64%)

As earlier mentioned, exophoric reference pertains to contextual elements that can only be interpreted within the situational context and understood by the audience. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the specific information necessary to interpret these elements is not contained within the text but it is inferred from outside the text based on a shared understanding between the writer and reader. Since exophoric reference retrieves its referent from outside the text, relying on situational context, it does not directly link the two elements together (Brown & Yule, 1983). Exophoric reference can be classified into two types: homophora and deixis.

As stated in Chapter Two, homophora refers to a reference made in a conversation or in writing that depends on the listener's or reader's general background knowledge for comprehension (Awwad, 2017). This type of exophoric reference was mostly used by students from School B. The following examples were extracted from students' texts in Schools A and B.

- a) I would like to firstly greet *the Honourable minister, the board, The principal, the deputy principal, Ø heads of departments, Ø esteemed teachers, the head prefects, the prefects.* [School B]
- b) Once I came out of the bathroom, the house phone rang and it was *Ø friend* of mine [School A]
- c) *Ø Principal* also told us about speaking or communicating in English all the time [School B]

The examples above, provided from written data, consistently demonstrate the omission of the definite article “the” or zero articles in the specific discourses under examination. Most of the entities mentioned, public figures and personalities with distinct public roles, are assumed to be familiar to the writer and the reader. Therefore, these referenced entities presuppose shared knowledge within these particular contexts. The missing definitive article is marked by the zero-article marker Ø as shown in the examples above. The same case of zero-article was observed in oral interviews with teachers although it was not frequent. In response to the interview question asked, Teacher X from School B responded “*Ø Students* misuse the internet and the language that they use influences....” As evidenced by the example, the definite article was omitted.

This finding echoes Hala-hala's (2021) observation that there were consistent cases of zero-definitives observed in both spoken and written data of the study. Worthy of note is that the entities mentioned in the examples above assume shared knowledge within these specific

physical contexts thus echoing the literature by Al-Hindawi and Saffah (2021), Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Sagrianti (2024). The findings further align with Mojapelo's (2007) observation that Sesotho does not contain the articles “a” and “the”; however, it does employ referential deixis, which involves indicating something based on exophoric situational or extralinguistic contexts. This is accomplished through the use of demonstrative and possessive determiners.

Deixis was also observed in students’ texts. As previously mentioned, deixis refers to pointing out specific times, places and things using general words or phrases. There are three types of deixis: personal, spatial, and temporal. Personal deixis uses pronouns like "I," "they," and "we" to indicate specific individuals. Brown and Yule (1983: 27) note that “to interpret these elements in a piece of discourse, it is necessary to know (at least) who the speaker and hearer are and the time and place of production of the discourse”. Awwad (2017) postulates that deixis is used in conversations between speakers with a shared knowledge of the context. This is demonstrated in the examples below extracted from students’ academic texts.

d) I play for *this* team. [School A]

e) We would like *you* as the minister to improve some of the physical amenities *here*, at school such as school park. [School B]

In the sentence in the example in d) above, the personal deixis “I” refers to the writer, indicating their involvement with a specific team. The proximate “this” is used to point to the team, suggesting that the reader is familiar with the team being referenced. However, without additional context, the exact team being referred to remains unclear. The reader would need to rely on their knowledge of the writer’s background or the specific context in which the statement is made to fully understand the meaning. In sentence e) above, the personal deixis “We” is used to refer to a group, likely the school community. The second-person singular pronoun “you” is used to address a specific person, the minister, indicating that the writer is referring directly to them. The demonstrative pronoun “this” is used to show unnecessary emphasis to specify the location where the physical amenities need improvement (the school) because both the audience in the text and the writer are in the same context.

Also noteworthy are the sporadic patterns of inappropriate usage of deictic references as shown in several sentences extracted from students’ texts. In the sentence, “We didn’t want to join does kind of teams” the phrase “does kind of teams” is grammatically incorrect and unclear. The use of “does” instead of ‘those’ creates a significant misunderstanding. A possible

explanation for this finding is that students' orthography in the ESL context is influenced by their pronunciation of words. Therefore, they have difficulties writing words that sound the same (homophones) correctly such as "those" and "does". "Those" is a distal deixis marker used to refer to places or objects that are far. In this case, it should refer to specific teams previously mentioned or understood in context.

However, the incorrect usage of "does" fails to convey the intended meaning, leaving the reader unsure about which teams are being referred to. As a result, the sentence lacks coherence and fails to communicate the writer's reluctance to join certain teams effectively. This lack of clarity undermines the effectiveness of the exophoric reference, as it relies on the reader's ability to identify the specific teams the writer is discussing. This finding resonates with the observations made by Al-Hindawi and Saffah (2021), Brown and Yule (1983) and Halliday and Hasan (1976) that exophoric references heavily rely on the context or situation.

The findings from students' texts further reflect that students failed to communicate their intention in their writing by forming incoherent sentences as demonstrated by the following example extracted from a student's text from School A: "This we have obtained position one in the country." The previously mentioned phrase is awkwardly constructed and lacks clarity. The demonstrative pronoun "this" is intended to refer to a specific achievement or context, but its placement at the beginning of the sentence makes it ambiguous. The reader is left wondering what "this" specifically refers to, whether it is an achievement, a recent event, or another context. Additionally, the phrase "obtained position one" is somewhat unnatural and could benefit from clearer phrasing, such as "we have obtained the number one position." The combination of these factors results in a text that does not effectively communicate the intended message, as the exophoric reference does not provide the necessary context for the audience to understand the significance of the achievement being discussed.

#### ***4.2.1.2 Endophoric Reference***

Endophoric reference is a cohesive device used for textual cohesion. It differs from exophoric reference, which derives entities or presuppositions from external sources or situational context. Instead, endophoric reference relies on presuppositions within the text itself to connect entities. This connection enhances the coherence of the text. Endophoric references are crucial for integrating different parts of the text into a unified whole and are categorised into two types: anaphoric and cataphoric (Sagrianti, 2024).

Chapter Two of this study highlighted that the most prevalent cohesive device used in texts is a backward reference to previously discussed elements. This specific form of reference is formally termed anaphora (Emah & Omachonu, 2018). Anaphoric references can be classified into personal, demonstrative and comparative. Based on the findings, students heavily relied on anaphoric references indicating a tendency to refer to antecedents for clarity. This phenomenon aligns with the widely accepted notion in linguistics that anaphoric references tend to facilitate comprehension for readers (Sagrianti, 2024).

Personal-anaphoric references were predominantly used in students' texts even more than personal deixes. Such recurring patterns of anaphoric reference were the personal pronouns "I", "We", "He", and "she" as exemplified below.

- a) *Me I* woke up finding my mother cooking breakfast, *she* sang a happy birthday song for *me*.
- b) My father mentioned something about a soccer match that *I* will be a part of because *he* knew that *I* love...

In the example in a) above, the third-person singular pronoun "she" refers back to the antecedent "mother". The first-person singular personal pronoun "I" immediately positions the writer as the subject of the sentence, emphasising their perspective and personal experience. However, the inappropriate usage of the object first-person pronoun "me" at the beginning of the sentence makes an incoherent text. This may be a transfer error from the first language. The possessive adjective in the phrase "my mother" not only identifies a specific family member but also evokes a sense of intimacy and warmth associated with maternal care. Interestingly, within the same sentence, the student employed two types of personal references: subjective pronouns "I" and "she" and objective pronoun "me". This finding suggests that students may have been taught cohesive devices as part of grammar, however, the inappropriate usages are probably because of the first language influence.

Additionally, the findings show salient use of subjective-anaphoric references "I", "We", "she" and "he" in students' writing. Equally interesting were instances where students repeatedly used the same adjectival noun multiple times within a single paragraph without using references. For example, "I shall continue by telling you about the effects of *peer pressure*. *Peer pressure* can affect...; *peer pressure* can lead to.... ; *peer pressure* may lead to...*peer pressure* may also lead to..." [School B].

The above finding echoes Sherman *et al.* (2019) who observed that one of the important functions of reference is to avoid repetition because redundancy makes a text dull to read. This could have been avoided by using the third-person singular personal pronoun “it”.

Additionally, there were problems of misuse of personal and causative verb references, for example, “*I had I* always thought that everything will soon belong to me” [School A]. The sentence structure in the previous example violates the order and usage of causative verbs in English. The sentence should have followed this pattern: subject + have+ object + base verb. Furthermore, the first-person singular personal reference “I” has been misused. An explanation for this kind of mistake may be mother tongue influence. During interviews with teachers regarding factors that influence students' learning, six teachers indicated that teaching writing was particularly challenging due to the influence of students' mother tongue. Furthermore, this kind of mistake makes it difficult to understand what is being referred to. This finding aligns with Tshotsho's (2006) findings which revealed that students often misused personal references in their texts, resulting in instances where the relationship between what is being referred to and what is mentioned later becomes unclear to the reader.

Added to these were the sporadic patterns of misspelt personal-anaphoric references. In the following example the third-person plural pronoun “they” has been misspelt: “Immediately when I arrived at school *the* all gave me presents”, “Themba is a very tranquil person who knew what *the* wanted and how they want it” [School A]. This finding suggests not only that students may lack knowledge of how to spell these cohesive devices but also that they do not proofread their work. Vitello (2022) argues that proofreading is an essential step in preparing a document for sharing with others. Typically, proofreading is considered to be the act of reviewing a finalised document to identify and correct any remaining errors, particularly those related to spelling, punctuation and grammar.

This finding also suggests that students in ESL contexts face difficulties in distinguishing between homophones. The intended meaning is likely that “they all” or “everyone” gave the writer presents upon their arrival at school. However, the incorrect usage of “the all” creates a confusing and unnatural sentence structure. This finding resonates with Hala-hala's (2021) findings that reflected salient systematic patterns of spelling pronunciations in observed data. Nordquist (2019) notes that “a pronunciation spelling is a spelling that more closely reflects the pronunciation of a given word than the word's traditional spelling. “

Furthermore, worthy of note were the sparse occurrences of inconsistent or shifting personal pronouns. For example, “Our English Teacher arrived, *she* was cute as you can picture *him*” [School A]. As can be seen in the previous illustration, the third-person singular, male pronoun “him” does not agree in gender with the third-person singular, female pronoun “she” which it refers back to. English grammar books note that the pronoun-noun agreement rule in English is that every pronoun must agree with the noun to which it refers. Pronouns should agree with the antecedent in number, gender and person (Herring, 2016). However, in Sesotho, there are no gendered pronouns. This indicates that there is a crosslinguistic influence at play. This finding coincides with Mokoena’s (1998) view that in contrast to many Indo-European languages like English, Spanish, or French, which employ distinct pronouns to signify gender, Sesotho uses gender-neutral pronouns to indicate gender.

Moreover, salient patterns of cases of missing personal references were also observed. For instance, “I thank you again for letting me express to you my thoughts about peer pressure. [missing] sure hope you enjoy your day” [School B]. As can be observed from the previous example “sure hope you enjoy your day,” demonstrates inappropriate use of personal references. The sentence begins with “sure” without a subject, which is grammatically incorrect because, unlike Sesotho, English is a non-pro-drop language. Pro-drop languages allow the omission of subject pronouns when the subject is clear from the context. This finding implies that students are influenced by current social media and societal trends which shape their writing styles and preferences. As noted by Jeffrey and Wilcox (2018), adolescents’ writing is frequently driven by relevant themes, audience interactions and the use of technological tools which they feel could further improve their writing. However, although they find personal writing enjoyable, they view assignments as less appealing, revealing a disconnect between their interests and formal writing requirements. This aligns with Teacher Y’s response in an interview that “Students do not read, therefore they fail to connect with the texts when writing. They are mainly interested in their phones and television and the language used in those tools influences their writing.”

Additionally, the second-person singular pronoun “you” is used without a clear referent, as it is unclear whether the student is still referring to the same person from the previous part of the sentence or someone else. The possessive pronoun “your” also lacks a clear antecedent. Again, this is probably a result of social media influence. As stated by Teacher X from School B, “Students misuse the internet and the language that they use influences how they write as they end up incorporating it into their writing.” The same finding was observed by Magogwe,



Mokibelo and Karabo (2023). The correct form could have been “I thank you again for letting me express to you my thoughts about peer pressure. *I* sure hope you enjoy your day.” In this sentence, the pronoun is clearly stated as the subject of the sentence.

Other noticeable occurrences include the usage of possessive adjectives to refer to individuals personally. Possessive adjectives modify nouns to indicate ownership or possession. They are used to indicate that something belongs to someone or something (Herring, 2016). In this kind of personal reference students from both schools used possessive adjectives “my”, “her”, “our” and “your”. The following are examples of possessive adjectives used in students’ texts:

- c) *My* friend said he would help you with *your* project. [School A]
- d) *Our* team believes that their performance will improve if they focus on *their* strengths [School B]
- e) *His* ideas are innovative and *their* implementation is crucial.

In the first sentence, “My friend said he would help you with your project,” the student uses the first-person singular possessive adjective “my” correctly to refer to the writer's friend. However, the use of the personal pronoun “he” in this sentence is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether “he” refers to the writer's friend or someone else. To clarify the meaning, the sentence could be rewritten as: “My friend said that he would help you with your project.”

In the sentence in d) above, the first-person plural possessive adjective “our” and the third-person plural possessive adjective “their” are both used appropriately, but they introduce another layer of ambiguity. “Our” clearly refers to the speaker's team, establishing a collective identity. However, “their” refers to another group, likely the opponents or other teams, which could lead to confusion about who is being discussed. To enhance clarity, the sentence could specify which group “their” refers to, such as: “Our team believes that the other team's performance will improve if they focus on their strengths.” The sentence, in example e) above, reveals that the third-person singular possessive adjective “his” is used correctly to refer to an individual whose ideas are being discussed. However, the transition to the third-person possessive adjective “their” to refer to the implementation of those ideas creates ambiguity. The use of “their” suggests a plural subject, which could confuse readers regarding whether it refers to the individual mentioned, or a group of people involved in the implementation. A clearer construction might involve maintaining consistency in the subject by using the third-person singular possessive adjective “his” throughout: “His ideas are innovative and his implementation is crucial.”

Students from both schools seemed to have an understanding of possessives compared to other categories of endophora. This is because they are used in their mother tongue. This finding resonates with Hala-hala's (2021) and Mojapelo's (2007) findings that although Lesotho may lack some of the aspects present in Indo-European languages, it has possessive determinatives such as "Muso *oa ka* (my government) (the first-person singular); or '*Muso oa rona* (our government)" as noted by Hala-hala (2021). In School A, in almost every introduction written by the students' the singular first-person possessive marker "my" was used whereas in School B "my" was used mostly in the body of the composition. In both schools, the third person plural, possessive adjective "their" was sporadically used especially in School A students' written texts.

Another typical cohesive device is forward reference, also referred to as cataphora. As Nordquist (2020) notes, cataphoric references are characterised by words or phrases that foreshadow information that appears later in the text. This approach aims to cultivate anticipation, establish connections and facilitate the navigation of the material for the reader or listener. Cataphoric reference was the least type of reference used in students' texts. The following are examples of cataphoric references:

- f) Unfortunately, my teammate, *Nthabeleng* lost so we had no choich [sic] but to be out of the game... Cataphoric reference [School A]
- g) They have also won the two sport games *here* at school. [School B]

In sentence a) above, the phrase "my teammate, *Nthabeleng*" serves as a cataphoric reference. The proper noun "*Nthabeleng*" introduces the subject before the reader fully understands the context of the situation. However, the sentence contains a typo ("choich" instead of "choice"), which may detract from coherence. While the cataphoric reference is technically appropriate, the overall effectiveness of the sentence is diminished by the error. The reference to "*Nthabeleng*" is clear, but the preceding context could be enhanced to better set up the situation.

In sentence b) above, the third-person plural pronoun "They" serves as a cataphoric reference to a group that is presumably defined in previous sentences or context. However, without prior mention of who "they" refers to, the cataphoric reference lacks clarity. The sentence assumes that the reader knows which group is the referent, which can lead to confusion if the context is not established. For effective communication, it would be beneficial to clarify who "they" refers to, perhaps by introducing the group earlier in the text. As noted by Nordquist (2020), cataphoric references are uncommon and not essential in the construction of written work.

Demonstrative references were also identified in students' texts. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, demonstrative reference is a reference by means of location, that is, it relies on indicating the location of something relative to the speaker's or writer's point of view (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). This is achieved by using demonstrative pronouns and adjectives. The proximates "this" and "these" were frequently used while the distal "that" and "those" were used sporadically. The following are examples of demonstrative references found in students' written texts:

h) *This* I have done in the morning... [School A]

i) I do not want to be friend [sic] with *does* kind of people. [School A]

While students from School B demonstrated comprehension of how to employ demonstrative references, those from School A encountered difficulties, as evidenced by instances of misuse, such as shown in examples h) and i) above. In example h), the demonstrative "this" was vaguely used, lacking clarity in terms of its referent's proximity. The proximate "this" was appropriately used as it indicates a specific action or task that the student has completed. However, the sentence is somewhat vague without additional context. The use of the demonstrative "this" implies that the student is referring to something previously mentioned or that the reader should understand from the context. To enhance clarity, it would be helpful to specify what "this" refers to, such as "I have done this task in the morning."

Furthermore, certain demonstrative reference devices were misspelt, as illustrated in sentence i). In this case, the student intended to use the distal marker "those", but instead used the verb "does". Such errors contribute to text incoherence and result in confusion. The sentence also contains a significant error in the use of demonstrative reference. The phrase "does kind of people" is incorrect and should be "those kind of people." The demonstrative pronoun "those" is essential here, as it indicates a specific group of people the speaker is referring to. The absence of the correct demonstrative reference leads to confusion, as the sentence lacks clarity about which individuals are being discussed. As previously indicated, students in ESL contexts often confuse words that are pronounced the same, as a result, they write words in their written texts as they sound. This indicates cross-linguistic features or transfer errors from L1. This finding coincides with Hala-hala's (2021) findings which revealed spelling pronunciations used in the written data of participants. The total number of demonstrative references used in students' texts in School A was 173 (10%) whereas in School B it was 108 (15%).

### 4.3 Conjunction

An element of cohesive ties frequent in writing is conjunction. As noted earlier, conjunctions play a crucial role in linking clauses, sentences and paragraphs to create a coherent and cohesive text. They help in showing the relationship between different parts of a text such as addition, contrast, cause and sequence. Halliday and Hasan (1976) distinguish between five types of conjunctive cohesion: additive, adversative, causal, temporal and continuative to extend the meaning of one sentence to a subsequent one. However, for this study, continuative conjunctions were not considered. The data from the above-mentioned categories is presented below.

#### 4.3.1 Additive Conjunctions

Additive conjunctions are used to add information. Bahaziq, (2016) notes that additive conjunctions link units that have similar meanings. The data from students' written text reflects consistent usage of the additive conjunction "and" which was predominantly used in School A students' written compositions while other additive conjunctions like "furthermore" and "also" were sparsely used. Similarly, with speeches written by School B students, the additive conjunction "and" was predominantly used. Additionally, students used additive conjunctions more frequently than other types of conjunctions. In School B, additive conjunctions were used 245 (82%) times while in School A they were employed 238 (59%) times. The following are examples of additive conjunctions found in students' texts:

- a) Drinks were finished so her mom asked us to go *and also* buy a few drinks. [School A]
- b) They showed us the computers, staffroom, geography staffroom, mathematics *and* science *and* technology *also* the toilets. [School A]
- c) *In addition*, we as students...*furthermore*, as you know our school is the best...we have obtained position one in the country with 9A\* *and* the first *and* only to score... [School B]

The example in a) above reflects the redundancy of additive conjunctions. The two conjunctions "and" and "also" serve the same purpose of adding additional information hence it is unnecessary to use both together. This helps maintain clarity and conciseness in writing. Bacha, Cortazzi and Nakhle (2002) indicate that cohesive devices form the foundation of clear communication.

Additionally, the data revealed sporadic occurrences of overuse of the additive conjunction "and". This was observed in students' written texts from School A as shown in the following

paragraph: “Lerato *and* Moima fought *and* they said Boitumelo cheated, we told them to stop fighting *and* made a truce. Boitumelo and Lerato lost one play *and* then Moima and Rathaha were feeling inwardly and fought...”

The previous example indicates that the coordinating conjunction “and” has been overused. This may suggest that students were not aware of additive conjunctions other than “and” thus contrasting with teachers’ responses in interviews that they mostly teach students grammar. Out of all the conjunctions used in students’ texts, additive conjunctions were mostly used with a frequency of 238 (60%) in School A and 245 (82 %) in School B. This finding corroborates Urmila’s (2021) observation that students mostly used the additive conjunction “and” in their writing.

#### **4.3.2 Adversative Conjunctions**

Adversative conjunctions, also known as connectives, are words or phrases that connect clauses or sentences by indicating contrast, opposition or concession (Urmila, 2021). The following are examples of adversative conjunctions found in students’ texts:

- a) *But however*, ladies and gentlemen if peer pressure is peer pressuring for a good cause... [School B]
- b) These actions not only jeopardise our own well being *but* also... [School B]
- c) I came across him *but* not remembering his face. [School A]
- d) And *yet* the illiterate me did not listen... [School A]
- e) ...our school is in great condition than last year *even though* there is still room for improving it further.[School B]

As demonstrated by the examples above, students in both schools used various adversative conjunctions in their texts. However, it is worth noting that the most used adversative conjunction was the coordinating conjunction “but”. “But” was used in students’ texts to show contrast as shown by examples a), b) and c) above. There was a case where a student used double conjunctions instead of one as shown in a) above. This suggests that the student was not sure which conjunction to choose so they decided to use both. A similar finding of the use of the adversative pronoun “but” was obtained by Bahaziq (2016). Some adversative conjunctions were used to show concession, that is, they acknowledge a point or situation, often followed by a contrasting idea. Adversative conjunctions also show contradiction by introducing a statement that contradicts the previous one. As shown in example e) above, the coordinating conjunction “yet” introduces a statement that contradicts the previous one.

There were sporadic instances where students used the adversative conjunction “but” inappropriately in a sentence. For example, in the sentence “I got happier *but* something else made me happy,” the adversative conjunction “but” is inappropriate. Adversative conjunctions typically indicate a contrast or opposition between two clauses. However, in this sentence, “but” is used to connect two clauses that are related and complementary. This finding resonates with Letsoela (2013) that students inappropriately used adversative conjunctions to connect sentences with similar meanings.

The sentence should be rewritten to use a conjunction that better conveys the intended meaning. For instance, “I got happier and something else made me happy”. In this sentence, the coordinating conjunction “and,” indicates a relationship of addition or simultaneity between the two clauses. This revised sentence accurately conveys that the writer got happier and something else also contributed to their happiness. The inappropriate usage of the adversative conjunction in the original sentence creates a sense of contrast or opposition that is absent in the intended meaning. This can lead to confusion and misinterpretation of the student’s statement. Hence, by using a more suitable conjunction, the sentence becomes clearer and more effective in conveying the intended message. Letsoela and Matlosa (2022) noted that choosing inappropriate conjunctions can make a text redundant and incohesive. Therefore, students must be familiar with conjunctions as one of the cohesive devices.

#### ***4.3.3 Causal Conjunctions***

As previously mentioned, causal conjunctions are used to show cause-and-effect relationships between ideas or events. They link a cause to its result or a reason to its consequence (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Students from both schools frequently employed the causal conjunction “because” in their texts.

In the following sentence derived from a student’s text “I was *so* stunned on how I am taller than him” [School A], the phrase “on how” is incorrect. The correct phrase would be “because” or “since.” The sentence should read: “I was so stunned because I am taller than him.” The original sentence lacks a causal conjunction, making it unclear what is causing the students’ stunned feelings. The revised sentence uses the causal conjunction “because” which indicates the reason for the student’s stunned feeling, making it more coherent. In the sentence “This is *because* the school park is a place for almost everything including a place to study.” [School B], the causal conjunction “because” is inappropriate. The sentence should read: This school park is a place for almost everything, including a place to study. The original sentence uses the causal conjunction “because” to introduce a reason, but it is unclear what the reason is. The

sentence is describing the characteristics of the school park not providing a cause-and-effect relationship. The revised sentence drops the causal conjunction, making it a simple descriptive sentence. This finding echoes Tsotsho's (2006) findings that students used causal conjunctions incorrectly as some causal conjunctions used in the clauses had no causal relationships with the preceding one.

#### **4.3. 4 Temporal Conjunctions**

As noted earlier, temporal conjunctions are used to indicate the timing of events, actions, or conditions, showing relationships in time between clauses or sentences. The following are sporadic patterns of temporal conjunctions extracted from students' texts.

- a) *Before*, I could go deep into thoughts...[School A]
- b) *Since*, I couldn't really control myself and the happiness...[School A]
- c) *After* receiving presents we took our school bags and went out. [School A]
- d) The academic performance has *since* last year improved...*after* school activities, including Netball... [School B]
- e) *Before*, I go any further, allow me to extend a sincere welcome... [School B]

Temporal conjunctions were the least used types of conjunctions in students' texts. However, the most used temporal conjunctions were those that indicate sequence such as "before" and "after" as denoted by examples a), c) and e). Additionally, the sparsely used temporal conjunctions were the ones that indicate duration such as "since" as shown in example b) above. These findings echo Magogwe, Mokibelo and Karabo(2023) and Urmila (2021).

Equally intriguing was the consistent use of conjunctive adverbials and transitional phrases in students' texts, particularly in the conclusion of the compositions and speeches. The redundancy of summators with the same meaning is evident in students' texts from School B. For example, "In conclusion, before I return to my seat. To sum up, I would like to end my speech by thanking you". These adverbs were used consecutively in the concluding paragraph. Added to this were the misapplied transitional phrases in which the transitional phrase "to set the ball rolling" was used in the body of the paragraph instead of "to keep the ball rolling". The phrase "to set the ball rolling" means to initiate or start something, whereas "to keep the ball rolling" means to maintain or continue something that has already begun.

If "to set the ball rolling" was used in the middle of the paragraph instead of "to keep the ball rolling," it would imply that the action or process being described has just started, rather than being maintained. This change in context alters the meaning of the paragraph to focus on the

initiation rather than the continuation of the action. Also, the two previously mentioned phrases have parallel structures and this makes it hard to differentiate between them. As earlier noted by Sherman *et al.* (2011), parallelism involves the use of corresponding words, phrases, clauses, or sentence structures to convey similar concepts. This technique enables the reader to transition seamlessly from one idea, sentence, or paragraph to another, facilitating a clearer understanding of the relationships and connections between those ideas

This finding fails to correspond with the teachers' responses as they claimed that they teach students how to use transitional phrases and consider their use when grading students' tasks. Teacher C's response was: "I consider the following aspects when teaching English: sentence variation, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, transitional phrases, idiomatic expression...." In some paragraphs, students did not use transitional phrases and conjunctive adverbials at all, as a result, their ideas were clustered and unclear. Similar findings by Magogwe, Mokibelo and Karabo (2023) revealed issues such as a lack of transition words to link sentences and paragraphs. Kyle and Crossley (2018) observed that not all cohesive devices have the same impact on text coherence, highlighting the need for writers to select conjunctions that best serve their goals.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced, examined and interpreted the data for this study. It has provided overall insights regarding the references and conjunction devices used in the written data. The oral data set was also considered. Specifically, the chapter has identified consistent patterns of misused cohesive devices, missing conjunctions and references and omissions of exophoric references. Reasons for such usages were given and gathered from the oral data from teachers. The upcoming chapter discusses the study's conclusions.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the key results and their significance. It also addresses the study's limitations and offers suggestions for future research, along with overall conclusions. The chapter evaluates the degree to which the study has fulfilled its purpose, which was to explore grammatical cohesion in Grade 10 learners' written texts at two selected schools in Maseru. Based on the qualitative research paradigm and methodology, the study aimed to answer the following research questions: What are the cohesive devices used in Grade 10 learners' written tasks? To what extent do Grade 10 students employ cohesive devices in their written texts? What could be the reasons for using such cohesive devices in their written texts?

#### 5.1 Summary of the Main Findings

This section highlights the primary outcomes of the study, emphasising overall insights on the following grammatical cohesion aspects: references and conjunctions. In particular, having examined such references used in students' writing, the findings in this study reveal that the highest number of cohesive tools used by students were references. This could mean that all the students were more familiar with these tools than others. In references, the total number reached was 2 394 (77%) while with conjunctions, the total number of occurrences added up to 710 (23%).

Of significance, salient reference types such as personal references "I" and "my" were predominantly used in School A students' written compositions, whereas the personal references "we" and "our" were predominantly used in School B. This corroborates Magogwe, Mokibelo and Karabo's (2023) findings that the most frequently used cohesive devices in their study were references and conjunctions. Other noticeable reference devices include the salient use of the demonstratives "their" and "this" in students' written speeches and compositions and the sparingly used demonstrative "those" and "here". The findings further revealed that students from both schools also varied their use of references. However, comparative reference was not used, implying that students were not well versed in using comparative references. Yet, in an interview with teachers, they confirmed that they did teach cohesive devices as part of grammar.

The findings further reflect that students encountered problems when using references in their writing. Findings from the written data consistently show omissions of articles or zero articles.

The definitive “the” was often omitted when referring to entities such as public figures and personalities in prominent public roles, which are assumed to be familiar to both the speaker and the audience as shown in the following example, “Ø *Students* misuse the internet and the language that they use influences...”. Such tendencies are consistent with learners and teachers using English as a second language as observed by Hala-hala (2021). This finding suggests that there is a mother tongue or crosslinguistic influence at play here. As noted by Mojapelo (2007), Sesotho does not contain the articles “a” and “the”, however, it does employ referential deixes, which involve indicating something based on exophoric situational or extralinguistic contexts. This is accomplished through the use of demonstrative and possessive determiners.

The above observation made by Mojapelo (2007) also explains why students were adept at using possessive adjectives “my”, “our”, “their” and “your” as personal references compared to other categories of endophoric references. It is due to their familiarity with these references in their native language. This finding resonates with Hala-hala’s (2021) findings that although Lesotho may lack some of the aspects present in Indo-European languages, it has possessive determinatives such as “*Muso oa ka* (my government) (the first-person singular); or ‘*Muso oa rona* (our government).”

Moreover, salient patterns of cases of missing personal references were also observed in students’ texts from both schools. For example, “I thank you again for letting me express to you my thoughts about peer pressure. [missing] sure hope you enjoy your day”. As can be observed from the previous example “sure hope you enjoy your day,” demonstrates inappropriate use of personal references. The sentence begins with “sure” without a subject, which is grammatically incorrect because, unlike Sesotho, English is a non-pro-drop language. Pro-drop languages allow the omission of subject pronouns when the subject is clear from the context.

This implies that students writing is influenced by factors such as social media and technology. Pro-drop is consistent with American English, since adolescents are at the forefront of trends, they easily adopt them in their writing. Jeffrey and Wilcox (2018) affirm this by stating that adolescents’ writing is frequently driven by relevant themes, audience interactions and the use of technological tools which they feel could further improve their writing. However, although they find personal writing enjoyable, they view assignments as less appealing, revealing a disconnect between their interests and formal writing requirements.

Worthy of note were also the sparse occurrences of inconsistent or shifting personal pronouns. For example, “Our English Teacher arrived, *she* was cute as you can picture *him*.” [School A]. As can be seen in the previous illustration, the third-person singular, male pronoun “him” does not agree in gender with the third-person singular, female pronoun “she” to which it refers back. English grammar books note that pronouns should agree with the antecedent in number, gender and person (Herring, 2016). However, in Sesotho, there are no gendered pronouns. This indicates that there is crosslinguistic influence at play. This finding coincides with Mokoena (1998) that in contrast to many Indo-European languages like English, Spanish, or French, which employ distinct pronouns to signify gender, Sesotho uses gender-neutral pronouns to indicate gender.

Moreover, the findings also reflect sporadic patterns of misused deictic expressions as shown in this example “This we have obtained position one”. In this instance, the proximity marker “this” has been vaguely used as it is not clear what the demonstrative is referring to. Additionally, some demonstrative references and deictic expressions were misspelt. This is demonstrated in the findings from students’ written texts “We didn’t want to join *does* kind of teams”. This instance shows that a spatial deixis marker “those” was mistaken for the verb “does”. This demonstrates that students write words the way they pronounce them (spelling pronunciation) as noted by Hala-hala (2021) and Mojapelo (2013). This finding suggests that some students still do not understand how to use demonstrative pronouns and this affects not just the coherence of their texts but their performance as well. This echoes Cornish's (2022) observation that students struggle with using exophoric references in their writing.

Additionally, findings from oral data show misuse of the spatial deixis marker “here”. This was observed in oral data from teachers as indicated by Teacher V’s response: “We, *here* teach students grammatical aspects such as conjunctions...” This implies that teachers do not understand some of the cohesive aspects themselves hence they can’t teach what they do not know. This finding resonates with literature on coherence that although cohesiveness is a writing skill that teachers aim to instil in students to enhance their writing performance, it is often viewed as a challenging concept to teach and grasp thus teachers teach it in a hazy manner (Abdissa & Kelemework, 2014).

Furthermore, the findings revealed a notable usage of endophoric references in students' texts. Anaphoric references dominated students' texts as they were used more frequently than the other types of references. The findings revealed sporadic instances where students repeatedly

used the same adjectival noun multiple times within a single paragraph without using anaphoric references as demonstrated by the following example: “I shall continue by telling you about the effects of *peer pressure*. *Peer pressure* can affect...*peer pressure* can lead to...*peer pressure* may lead to...*peer pressure* may also lead to...” [School B]. As previously stated, one crucial role of referencing is to prevent redundancy, as repetitive content can render a text dull and unengaging for readers.

The findings further showed problems of misusing personal references coupled with wrong usages of causative verbs that deviate from the English pattern: subject+ have+ object+ base verb. For example, “I had I always thought that everything will soon belong to me.” [School A]. In this case, the personal reference “I” has been misused, along with the causative “had”. This creates an incohesive text. This kind of error may be a result of mother tongue influence or that the students were not taught how use use causative verbs. During interviews with teachers regarding factors impacting students' learning, the majority indicated that teaching writing was particularly challenging due to the influence of students' mother tongue. Furthermore, this kind of mistake makes it difficult to understand what is being referred to.

Moreover, the most recurring types of conjunctions found in students’ texts from both schools were additive conjunctions with 238 (58%) occurrences in School A and 245 (82%) in School B. Interestingly, the additive conjunction “and” was used predominantly in both schools. This implies that students did not know how to use other additive conjunctions hence they resorted to using the additive “and”. Second to additive conjunctions in terms of frequency were causal conjunctions with a total of 62 (15%) occurrences in School A and 29 (10%) in School B. This result suggests that students were educated on the types of conjunctions and how and when to use them in writing. This finding corroborates teachers’ responses to the interview question ‘What do you consider when grading students’ texts? Most teachers responded that they consider factors such as punctuation, grammar in general and mechanical accuracy. As a result, conjunctions were probably taught as part of grammar.

The findings further depicted that although students from both schools varied their use of conjunctions, they encountered some problems when using conjunctions. Such problems include using the wrong conjunction to join sentences. For example, “I got happier but something else made me happy”. “But” serves as a coordinating conjunction that links contrasting ideas together but in this case, it is used to join complementary sentences (Herring, 2016). This finding replicates Letsoela’s (2013) results that students used adversative

conjunctions to connect sentences with the same meaning. The least used types of conjunctions in both schools were temporal conjunctions. This implies that students possess a limited understanding of temporal conjunctions.

The summarised findings indicate that the research objectives have been achieved as various cohesive devices were identified in students' written texts. The frequency of these devices in texts revealed the extent of their usage by the students. Additionally, potential reasons for these usages were explored through responses from teachers during the interviews and the researcher's observations.

## **5.2 Limitations of the Study**

Similar to other research, this study has faced certain limitations, even with its objective of collecting comprehensive and detailed data for analysing the phenomenon of grammatical cohesion. One drawback is that the sample could have included the oral data on the investigation of cohesive devices from students and solicit their opinions on their learning experiences to account for mistakes made in their writing. Also planned was to examine cohesion and coherence in more schools around Maseru. However, the timeframe given by the the National University of Lesotho prohibited this as it clashed with winter examinations and tests of students. This would have helped contribute to the findings of this study and that might have had an impact on the results obtained.

Despite challenges, the study has significantly met its primary objectives. These include identifying the cohesive devices that students use in their written compositions and speeches.

## **5.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

Reflecting on the of the limitations of this study, it is advisable to propose potential avenues for future research, which could expand or build upon this current investigation. While this study focused on analysing grammatical cohesion and coherence among high school students, it would be beneficial for future researchers to explore other educational levels, particularly at the primary school level. Interviews with high school English educators revealed a widespread consensus that challenges with English writing often originate during primary school education. Moreover, this study could also be undertaken at the university or college level with a broader scope.

Furthermore, the study has highlighted possibly one of the overlooked aspects of writing in Lesotho, hence opening up some possibilities for future researchers to replicate the study. They could even focus on lexical cohesion or choose one of the cohesive devices to focus on and

study the phenomena in detail by probably using quantitative or mixed methods approaches to carry out the studies. Future researchers may utilise alternative data collection methods to investigate the same writing phenomenon, enabling them to compare findings with this study or replicate its methods to potentially uncover divergent outcomes.

Future research could also not only explore grammatical coherence at the textual level but also in speech or oral data as well taking heed of aspects such as age, gender and the environment or background of the participant as these factors may affect second language learning and in turn the use of cohesive devices employed in writing. Finally, further research could focus on other aspects that affect the coherence of a text such as tense, subject-verb agreement and punctuation.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study concludes that the students in the selected schools have an average understanding of academic writing practices. On this basis, the present study has achieved its aim of identifying cohesive devices employed in written compositions and speeches of Grade 10 students. The research findings indicated that the compositions and speeches collected from students need to be revamped as numerous mistakes were made in the usage of cohesive devices. Based on these findings, the study concludes that while students in both schools understood how to use cohesive devices, they encountered difficulties, possibly due to factors such as unclear instruction from their teachers, mother tongue influence, social media and cultural trends. This underscores the need for educators to reconsider their approach to teaching cohesive devices, encouraging regular practice and feedback to help students improve. Language practitioners including teachers, academics and perhaps any other researchers with an interest in language issues should not only pay closer attention to the concepts of cohesion and coherence but should also emphasise their role in enhancing students' writing proficiency, thereby contributing to improved academic performance.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: Sample Research Questions for Semi-structured Interviews with Target Teachers**

1. How long have you been working as an English Language Teacher?
2. What in your opinion is the most challenging aspect of English Language to teach?
3. What do you consider when grading students' written practises?
4. In your experience, what aspects of English language have students had difficulty comprehending?
5. Would you observe any challenges facing the English language teaching in Lesotho?
6. If so, would you suggest any solutions?

## **Appendix 2: Diagnostic Tests for Students**

Answer **One** of the following questions

### **Question 1: Creative Writing**

Write a composition on **one** of the following Topics:

1. The best day of my life
2. An embarrassing experience
3. First day of school

**Allocated time: 40 minutes**

### **Question 2: Directed Writing**

**Write a speech on one of the following questions:**

1. The minister of Education in your country is to pay an official visit to your country school. As a senior student you have been nominated to deliver a speech on the occasion of the visit. Write your speech, in which you consider the following:
  - Welcome and expression of gratitude for the visit
  - Appeal for improvement in physical amenities (comfort)
  - Achievements by students and teachers during the year
2. You are concerned that many learners in your school are affected by peer pressure and you had a meeting in your club in which this issue was discussed. You decide to share the information from the club with your classmates. Write a speech. Include the following points
  - What is peer pressure?
  - Effects of peer pressure.
  - How it can be managed

### Appendix 3: Letters Requesting Permission for Conducting Observations

Upper Thamae  
P. O. Box 9562  
Maseru 100  
8 May 2024

The Principal  
Lesotho High School  
P.O. Box 46  
Maseru 100

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your school for my Master's degree in English Language and Linguistics program. The title of my study is "Investigating Grammatical Cohesion and Coherence in Student's Written Compositions".

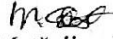
The purpose of my research is to find out how students employ grammatical cohesion and coherence devices to improve their writing in high schools around Maseru. This study will shed the light on the challenges faced by teachers and students in the implementation of cohesive devices in writing and investigate the strategies to overcome these challenges. This will help improve students' performance and yield better results. The research entails that I study students' written compositions and interview teachers.

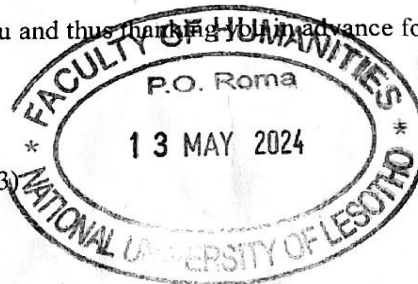
I believe that your school would be an excellent location for my study due to diversity and accessibility. Furthermore, this school has a strong reputation for academic excellence in English. Therefore, participation of teachers and students at school would greatly contribute to the success of my research project. I assure you that all data collected during the research will be kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of the study. I will also ensure that the research activities will not disrupt the normal functioning of the school.

The research is supervised by Dr. Mokhoele Aaron Hala-hala from the National University of Lesotho (phone: +266 63832503; e-mail: [ma.hala-hala@nul.ls](mailto:ma.hala-hala@nul.ls))

I look forward to hearing from you and thus thank you in advance for your approval of my request.

Yours sincerely

  
Matšelisio Mary Chere (201501253)



Upper Thamae  
P. O. Box 9562  
Maseru 100  
8 May 2024

The Principal  
Sefika High School  
P.O Box 2643  
Maseru 100

Dear Sir/ Madam

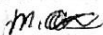
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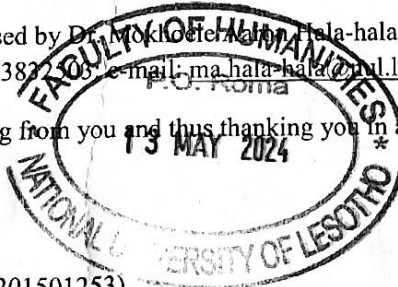
The purpose of my research is to find out how students employ grammatical cohesion and coherence devices to improve their writing in high schools around Maseru. This study will shed the light on the challenges faced by teachers and students in the implementation of cohesive devices in writing and investigate the strategies to overcome these challenges. This will help improve students' performance and yield better results. The research entails that I study students written compositions and interview teachers.

I believe that your school would be an excellent location for my study due to diversity and accessibility. Furthermore, this school has a strong reputation for academic excellence in English. Therefore, participation of teachers and students at school would greatly contribute to the success of my research project. I assure you that all data collected during the research will be kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of the study. I will also ensure that the research activities will not disrupt the normal functioning of the school.

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I look forward to hearing from you and thus thanking you in advance for your approval of my request.

Yours sincerely  
  
Matšelisio Mary Chere (201501253)



## Appendix 4: Sample Texts from Students

~~Maimo, Yanni~~

~~15<sup>th</sup> May 2022 English Grade 10 Thursday~~

The best day of my life

Had I known that I could ever be this happy in my life?

It was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022. This day was my best day ever when we were closing the schools and also ~~it~~ it was my birthday. Then I arrived at school, when I got to school my friends were obligated to surprise me somehow. Immediately when I arrived at school they all ~~gave~~ <sup>gave</sup> me presents and to be frank I was on cloud nine and ~~to be~~ also I was dubious that they could do that.

After receiving presents we took our school bags and went out, we took a decision that we were going to Pioneer mall, Mthabeni was very elated <sup>about</sup> ~~with~~ this. We got to Pioneer mall, when we arrived Maimo was very ~~terrified~~ terrified to walk on an elevator, that was quite a show but we told her that nothing ~~was~~ was going to happen to her, but <sup>conjunction</sup> she was unconvinced.

Maimo was like "Guys I am going to fall" we giggled at her. We got off the elevator and went to have food, Lerato and Botumelo ordered pizza at Steers, ~~bag~~ and KFC. After <sup>R</sup> they ordered all at ~~those~~ <sup>R</sup> while they were still waiting for the orders to come out, they <sup>R</sup> went to Pick and pay to buy me a cake.

Honourable Minister of Education,  
Distinguished Board members,  
Our Principal and teachers,  
Fellow Students,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

our honourable minister

I extend the warmest welcome to ~~you all~~ and  
on behalf of our school community. We are  
deeply grateful for the honor of your  
visit today. Your presence here ~~signifies~~  
~~your~~ is a sign of enthusiasm in our  
education system.

As I stand here today, I would like to  
take this opportunity to highlight some  
area where we believe improvements are  
needed. While our school seeks to provide the  
best education possible, we cannot miss the  
importance of having suitable physical amenities.  
We are in need of upgrades to create a  
more cooperate learning environment. We  
request for great resources for the  
schools amenities.

Besides the challenges we face, both students and  
teacher have worked tirelessly throughout  
the year, achieving remarkable success. Our  
students have <sup>highly</sup> improved academically.

