

Grammatical Cohesive Devices of Students Writing Recount Text in Vocational High School

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the types and the meaning of grammatical cohesive devices in students' recount texts. The object of the study was 26 recount texts written by tenth-grade students. Data were collected through documentation and analyzed using qualitative content analysis as proposed by Mayring (2014), involving categorization, abstraction, and coding based on Halliday and Hasan's cohesion framework. The analysis revealed 590 instances of grammatical cohesive devices. Reference was the most frequently used, occurring 460 times, indicating students' strong dependence on personal and demonstrative references to maintain coherence. Conjunctions were the second most common, with 129 instances, demonstrating their role in connecting events and ideas. Substitution appeared only once, while ellipsis was not found in any of the texts. The study concludes that reference and conjunction are the dominant cohesive devices used by students in constructing recount texts, helping to maintain the logical flow and coherence of their narratives. The rare use of substitution and the absence of ellipsis suggest these forms are less familiar to students and require further instructional emphasis. This analysis highlights the importance of grammatical cohesion in supporting the clarity and unity of student writing.

I. Introduction

Discourse is a style of communication governed by norms, customs, and shared meanings within a community or context [1]. It includes both language and the broader sociocultural setting in which communication occurs. Language in discourse serves to express ideas, negotiate power relations, build identities, and convey information. Discourse takes oral and written forms, referred to as texts. Oral discourse includes spoken texts such as speeches, interviews, dialogues, and monologues, while written discourse includes leaflets, posters, newspapers, magazines, and books [2].

Discourse analysis studies how language is used to shape social reality and create meaning [3]. It examines language beyond individual sentences in both oral and written forms. Since discourse is closely related to text, the term text implies interconnected elements forming a unified whole [1]. Writing is considered one of the most challenging language skills [4], requiring coherence and cohesion for clarity and comprehension [5]. In classrooms, students learn to write various text types, including Narrative, Procedure, Exposition, and Descriptive texts. This study focuses on recount texts, which retell past events or experiences.

Writing as a form of discourse requires coherence and cohesion for unity and logical flow. According to Halliday and Hasan [6], a well-written text must employ coherence and cohesion. These elements help connect sentences and paragraphs, ensuring meaningful communication. Cohesion, the primary focus of this study, ensures the logical progression of ideas [7]. Cohesive devices link clauses and sentences to create meaning, establishing relationships between text elements. Cohesion enhances continuity, making interpretation easier [8]. Cohesive devices are categorized into grammatical and lexical types. Cohesion is not naturally occurring but achieved through cohesive

devices. Halliday and Hasan classify cohesive devices into grammatical (conjunctions, ellipses, references, and substitutions) and lexical (collocation and repetition) [9].

Several researchers have examined cohesion in student writing. Hibatulloh [10] found that undergraduate students at IAIN Kediri primarily used references and conjunctions as grammatical devices, with repetition as the dominant lexical device. Halimatusyahdiah & Ginting [11] analyzed class X students' recount texts at SMAN 15 Medan, finding lexical cohesion most frequently used. Lestari [12] found that MAN 2 Jember class X students relied more on grammatical cohesion, especially conjunctions. Ariwibowo et al. [13] studied recount texts from class X students at MAN Huta Godang and found that grammatical cohesion, particularly reference, was dominant. Sukma [14] examined class VIII students' recount texts and identified reference as the most commonly used cohesive device, followed by conjunctions, lexical cohesion, ellipsis, and substitution. Nurpitriyani [15] studied class IX students at MTS Pembangunan UIN Jakarta and found reference as the most common grammatical cohesive device, followed by conjunction, substitution, and ellipsis. Rita Zahara¹, Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf, Iskandar Abdul, Sama, And Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh [16] A study of 33 essays written by Indonesian EFL high school students found that all five cohesive devices, reference, conjunction, lexical cohesion, ellipsis, and substitution were present, with reference being the most frequently used, followed by conjunctions and lexical cohesion, while ellipsis and substitution were relatively rare. Previous studies analyzed both grammatical and lexical cohesive devices, with few focusing solely on grammatical cohesion. Therefore, this study specifically examines grammatical cohesive devices in recount texts, aiming to identify the types of grammatical cohesion used and their meanings in students' writing. Thus, it fills the gap left by prior research that either combined grammatical and lexical analysis or did not delve into the meanings conveyed by grammatical cohesion. A qualitative descriptive approach is applied, evaluating students' use of grammatical cohesion.

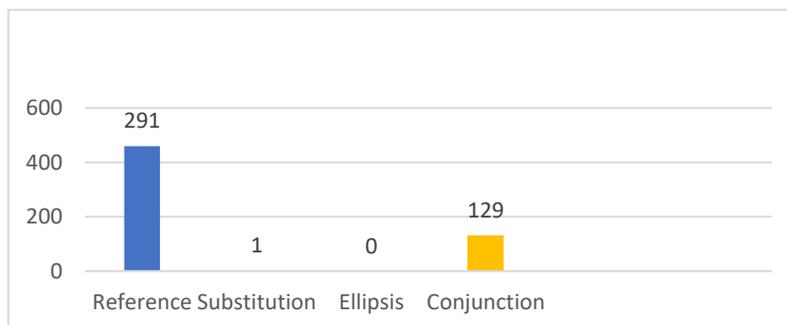
II. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using content analysis. Qualitative research allows an in-depth exploration of students' use of grammatical cohesive devices in recount texts. Content analysis is applied to examine students' writing at SMK NU Ma'arif Jatirejo Mojokerto, involving categorization, abstraction, and coding of grammatical cohesion elements [17]. The data source is students' recount text assignments from tenth-grade students at SMK NU Ma'arif Jatirejo Mojokerto in the 2024/2025 academic year. The data comprises words and phrases containing cohesive devices in students' writing. The texts were selected based on the following criteria: they were recount texts written by tenth-grade students at SMK NU Ma'arif Jatirejo Mojokerto, they were produced during the 2024/2025 academic year, and they contained cohesive devices, such as references, conjunctions, ellipsis, and substitutions, which served as the primary focus of analysis. The primary research instrument is documentation. Burns [7] states that documents serve as a rich source of information, supplementing observations and providing a comprehensive view of a setting. In this study, the documents analyzed are recount texts written by students. Data collection follows a documentation method, which involves gathering written materials as sources of information. Creswell [18] states that documentation studies provide insights into the historical context, policies, events, and developments relevant to the phenomenon under study. The researchers collaborated with an English teacher to assign students to write recount texts. The collected texts were then analyzed for grammatical cohesive devices. The study employs content analysis, a systematic approach to analyzing written communications. According to Cole [19], content analysis categorizes verbal or written data for tabulation and classification. Mayring [20] outlines the following steps:

1. Categorization: Identifying similar units and classifying data into grammatical cohesive devices.
2. Abstraction: Defining categories to provide a broad overview of the topic.
3. Coding the Text: Labeling text elements according to Halliday and Hasan's cohesion framework [21].

III. Results and Discussion

The following results present the types of grammatical cohesive devices found in students' recount texts. The researcher collected the data and calculated the frequency of each type. Furthermore, the chart below displays the data on the number of occurrences of each type of grammatical cohesive devices used in the recount texts.



Graph 1. Type of grammatical cohesive devices

Graph 1 presents a total of 590 grammatical cohesive devices identified in 26 students' recount texts. There are four subcategories of grammatical cohesion: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Reference is the most frequently used type, occurring 460 times. The second most frequent is a conjunction, with 129 occurrences. Ellipsis ranks third with 0 occurrences, while substitution appears only once. Based on the research focus stated in the introduction, the study aims to identify the types of cohesive devices used in students' recount texts. Therefore, to address this objective, the researcher presents the results of the analysis of grammatical cohesive devices found in the students' recount texts.

The types of grammatical cohesive devices are identified in the recount texts written by students of SMK NU Ma'arif Jatirejo, Mojokerto.

Reference

According to M. Bloor and T. Bloor [22], reference in a text occurs when the interpretation of a particular linguistic element depends on another element within the same text. This form of reference is essential for establishing cohesion, as it enables various parts of the text to be meaningfully interconnected. In both linguistic and situational contexts, cohesive devices—such as pronouns, articles, demonstratives, and comparatives—are employed to refer to specific elements that have either been previously mentioned or are understood from the context.

1. Personal Reference

Personal reference is a type of cohesive device used to maintain continuity within a text. It involves referring to participants in the communication through the category of person, serving a specific function in the speech situation [22]. Personal reference typically refers to people or things previously mentioned, helping to avoid unnecessary repetition and contributing to the smooth flow of the text. The category of personal reference includes three main classes: personal pronouns (e.g., *I, you, we, he*), possessive determiners (commonly referred to as possessive adjectives, such as *my, your, his*), and possessive pronouns (e.g., *mine, yours, his*) (Maryati & Suprapti, 2018:31). In the students' recount texts, the personal reference items identified include personal pronouns and possessive determiners. Personal pronouns function to replace the name of a person, while possessive determiners indicate ownership. Examples of personal reference can be seen in the following data:

My vacation in Sarangan last year was very memorable. (data 2:S5)

In the sentence above the word “My” functions as a reference in grammatical cohesive devices—specifically, it is a possessive determiner (or possessive adjective).

After that on the last day, I went shopping for some souvenirs. (data 25:S7)

In the sentence above the word “I” is classified as a personal reference because it is a first-person pronoun that refers to the speaker or writer within the text.

2. Demonstrative Reference

According to Halliday and Hasan [22], demonstrative reference refers to the use of location-based pointing, which functions as a form of verbal indication along a scale of proximity. It includes both neutral and specific (selective) demonstratives. The neutral demonstrative is represented by *the*, while selective demonstratives include *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, *here*, and *there*. In the students' recount texts, the demonstrative references identified are *this*, *these*, *that*, *those*, *the*, and *there*. Examples of these demonstratives can be seen in the following data:

I arrived there at 4 a.m in the morning. (data 1:S3)

In the sentence above, the word “There” is a demonstrative that refers to a place previously mentioned or known from the context.

I was very happy to have the opportunity to visit these places again. (data 27:S7)

In the sentence above, the word “These” is a demonstrative reference because it points to specific items (places) and helps maintain cohesion by linking back to earlier parts of the text.

3. Comparative Reference

According to Halliday and Hasan [22], comparative reference refers to the use of comparison in a text, either through similarity or identity. In essence, it is a cohesive device that connects elements by comparing one thing with another. There are two types of comparison found in comparative reference: general and particular. General comparison involves comparing items based on overall similarity or difference, without pointing to specific characteristics. This type of comparison typically uses certain adjectives and adverbs to express likeness or contrast. On the other hand, particular comparison focuses on specific qualities or quantities, often marked by comparative forms of adjectives and adverbs such as *more*, *less*, *better*, or *further*. Instances of comparative reference can be found in the following data:

Meanwhile, some other friends were tried to make a camp. (data 18:S7)

In the sentence above, the word “other” is a comparative reference because it shows a distinction between one group and another previously mentioned or implied group. It expresses difference, which is a key function of comparative reference.

Substitution

According to Halliday and Hasan [22], substitution refers to the replacement of a word or phrase with another within a text. For example: “I left my book at home, do you have one?” In this sentence, the word “one” functions as a substitute for “book.” Substitution is categorized into three types: nominal, verbal, and clausal substitution.

1. Nominal Substitution

Nominal substitution is a linguistic strategy in which a noun phrase is replaced by a pronoun or another element that refers to the same entity, in order to prevent repetition. As stated by Janna (2018:19), nominal substitution involves the use of a substitute item appropriate for a nominal group. This method contributes to making speech or writing more concise and fluid. It enhances clarity and minimizes redundancy in communication. Examples of nominal substitution can be found in the following data:

Then my motorbike had trouble, the chain broke 3 times. I bought a new one when I arrived in Sarangan. (data 1:S5&6)

In the sentence above, the word “One” is a nominal substitution because it replaces a noun, making the sentence cohesive without unnecessary repetition.

2. Verbal Substitution

Verbal substitution is a linguistic method in which a verbal phrase or clause is replaced by another verb or verbal form to avoid repetition and enhance the flow of the text or speech. This approach helps make communication more concise and efficient by reducing redundancy. One common substitute is the verb “do,” which can stand in for a verb or verbal group. It typically functions as the head of the group and often appears at the end of the clause (Satria & Handayani, 2018:147). However, in the analysis, the researcher did not identify any instances of verbal substitution in the students' recount texts.

3. Clausal Substitution

Clausal substitution occurs when one clause is replaced by another within a sentence (Hidayat, 2016:5). It is a linguistic strategy used to avoid repeating the same clause by using a different clause or a shorter expression. This method helps maintain coherence and fluency in both spoken and written language. However, in the analysis, the researcher did not identify any instances of clausal substitution in the students' recount texts.

Ellipsis

According to Halliday and Hasan [22], ellipsis refers to the omission of certain elements that are grammatically expected but are left out because they are understood from the context. In other words, ellipsis takes place when key parts of a sentence or clause are omitted, and their meaning can be inferred from the surrounding text. Halliday and Hasan (1976:146) categorize ellipsis into three types: nominal ellipsis, verbal ellipsis, and clausal ellipsis.

1. Nominal Ellipsis

Nominal ellipsis is a linguistic technique in which a noun phrase is omitted from a sentence because its meaning is already clear from the context or has been previously stated (Yusuf, 2021:29). This method helps eliminate unnecessary repetition and makes the sentence more concise. However, in the analysis, the researcher did not identify any instances of nominal ellipsis in the students' recount texts.

2. Verbal Ellipsis

Verbal ellipsis refers to the omission of a verbal phrase in a sentence when the meaning is already clear from the context or has been mentioned earlier (Sari, 2018:29). This strategy helps to make the sentence more concise by avoiding repetition of lengthy verbal expressions. However, in the analysis, the researcher did not identify any instances of verbal ellipsis in the students' recount texts.

3. Clausal Ellipsis

Clausal ellipsis is a linguistic technique where a clause is left out from a sentence because its meaning can be inferred from the context or has been stated earlier. This helps prevent repeating the same clause and makes the sentence more concise. However, in the analysis, the researcher did not identify any instances of clausal ellipsis in the students' recount texts.

Conjunction

According to Halliday and Hasan [23], conjunction conveys a particular meaning and suggests the presence of other elements within the discourse. It functions as a marker that indicates and clarifies the relationship between clauses. As a form of grammatical cohesion, conjunction serves as a semantic link that specifies how the upcoming information is systematically connected to what has already been presented (Safitri & Chairuddin, 2022:11). Conjunctions reflect various semantic relationships and describe the flow of ideas in relation to what came before. They are generally classified into four categories: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal conjunctions.

1. Additive

An additive conjunction functions to connect or coordinate elements by adding information to what has already been mentioned. This type of conjunction is typically indicated by words such as *and*, *also*, *too*, *furthermore*, and *additionally*. Examples of additive conjunctions can be observed in the following data:

The next day, we went to a geological museum and talked with the guide about geology.
(data 3:S8)

After having fun, we sat under a tree and enjoyed the food we had bought from home. (data 22:S8)

In the sentence above, the word “And” is an additive conjunction because it adds another action to the previous one, helping maintain cohesion in the sentence.

We also walked along the bridge leading to Ismoyo Island. (data 22:S5)

In the sentence above, the word “also” is an additive conjunction because it adds an idea to the previous information and contributes to the grammatical cohesion of the text.

2. Adversative

Adversative conjunctions indicate a relationship that contrasts with what is expected. They are used to express opposing ideas or viewpoints (Nazilah, 2018:25). Common adversative conjunctions include *yet*, *but*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *at the same time*, and *in fact*. An example of an adversative conjunction can be found in the following data:

My holiday in Banyuwangi was only two days, but it made me happy. (data 3:S11)
I was so tired, but it was an amazing moment that I would never forget. (data 18:S11)
The trip took about two hours, but the tiredness disappeared ... calm waves. (data 22:S3)

the words “after,” “meanwhile,” and “before” in the sentences above are all examples of temporal conjunctions because they indicate the time relationship between events. “After” introduces an action that occurred following another event, showing a sequence in time. “Before” signals that one event happened earlier than another, establishing a chronological order. “Meanwhile” indicates that two actions were happening simultaneously, highlighting parallel events. These temporal conjunctions help maintain the flow of the narrative and ensure logical coherence by clearly marking when each event occurred in relation to others.

3. Causal

Causal relations refer to connections expressing result, reason, or purpose. Common causal conjunctions include *so*, *therefore*, *because*, *for this reason*, *as a result*, *then*, and *otherwise* [21]. Examples of causal conjunctions can be found in the following data:

We didn't have enough time to visit some tourist places there because of the rain. (data 5:S6)
As a result, we just stayed at home almost all day long. (data 5:S8)

In the sentence above, the words “because” and “as a result” in the sentences above are both examples of causal conjunctions. “Because” introduces a reason or cause explaining why the speaker didn't have enough time to visit tourist places—it points to the rain as the cause. Meanwhile, “as a result” signals the effect or consequence of the previous situation, showing that due to the rain and lack of time, they stayed at home most of the day. Both words establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the clauses, which is the main function of causal conjunctions in creating cohesion within the text.

4. Temporal

The final type of conjunction is the temporal conjunction, which indicates the chronological order of events [24]. It signals the sequence or timing of actions and is typically expressed through words such as *then*, *next*, *after that*, *the next day*, *until then*, *during*, *at the same time*, and *at this point* [21]. Temporal conjunctions help inform the reader about when specific events or situations occur. Examples of temporal conjunctions can be seen in the following data:

After I arrived, I decided to take a shower and rest for a while. (data 9:S3)
Meanwhile, some other friends were trying to make a camp several meters from our tents. (data 18:S7)
Before I came to the train station, I didn't know how to check in for all those procedures. (data 23:6)

The words "after," "meanwhile," and "before" in the given sentences are all categorized as temporal conjunctions because they indicate time relationships between events. "After" introduces an action that occurs following another event, as seen in "After I arrived..." showing the sequence of arriving before taking a shower. "Meanwhile" signals simultaneous actions, referring to something happening at the same time as another event. "Before" introduces an event that occurred earlier than another, as in "Before I came to the train station..." emphasizing a prior condition. These conjunctions help maintain coherence by organizing the flow of time in the narrative.

The meanings of cohesive devices found in students' recount texts of SMK NU Ma'arif Jatirejo, Mojokerto.

Based on the analysis of students' recount texts at SMK NU Ma'arif Jatirejo, Mojokerto, several types of cohesive devices were identified, each serving specific functions that contribute to textual cohesion and coherence. The detailed explanation is as follows:

Reference

Reference devices are used to avoid repetition and to link parts of the text by referring back to people, places, or things already mentioned or assumed to be known by the reader. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), reference is a grammatical cohesion that signals identity, similarity, or difference between items in discourse.

1. Personal reference

This type includes personal pronouns and possessive determiners that refer to participants in the text, mainly the narrator or writer themselves. For example, "I" and "my" signal the speaker's involvement and ownership. This corresponds with Halliday and Hasan's category of personal reference, which functions to maintain clarity about who is performing actions or who owns certain things in the narrative, thus helping readers follow the story easily.

2. Demonstrative reference

Demonstrative references such as "there" and "these" point to specific locations or objects already introduced in the text. In line with Halliday and Hasan's theory, demonstrative reference serves to connect sentences by referring to contextually recoverable elements, helping maintain continuity and flow in discourse.

3. Comparative reference

Words like "other" function to signal comparison or differentiation, as explained by Halliday and Hasan under comparative reference. These forms contribute to textual cohesion by relating one item to another in terms of likeness or difference, aiding the organization of narrative information.

Substitution

Substitution involves replacing an item with another word to avoid repetition. Halliday and Hasan classify substitution into three types: nominal, verbal, and clausal.

1. Nominal substitution

The word "one" was found in the students' texts, functioning as a substitute for previously mentioned nouns. For example, "I bought a new one" substitutes for "a new motorbike". This aligns with Halliday and Hasan's nominal substitution, which links clauses while avoiding repetition.

2. Verbal substitution and clausal substitution

These types were not found in the students' recount texts. This absence aligns with Halliday and Hasan's view that verbal and clausal substitution tends to appear in more complex or advanced discourse, whereas beginning writers often rely on explicit verbal expressions.

Ellipsis

No instances of nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis were identified in the students' texts. In Halliday and Hasan's framework, ellipsis functions similarly to substitution but through **omission** rather than replacement. The lack of ellipsis in the students' writing may indicate their preference for clarity and explicitness over conciseness, which is typical at their developmental stage.

Conjunction

Conjunctions function as cohesive devices by signaling logical relationships between sentences or clauses. Halliday and Hasan categorize conjunctions into four main types: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal all of which were found in the data.

1. Additive – Words like “and” and “also” match Halliday and Hasan’s additive conjunction, connecting similar ideas or actions and extending meaning.
2. Adversative – The conjunction “but” represents adversative cohesion, signaling contrast or exception, as categorized by Halliday and Hasan.
3. Causal – Words such as “because” and “as a result” express cause-effect relationships, aligning with the causal category.
4. Temporal – Conjunctions like “after,” “meanwhile,” and “before” express time relations, fulfilling the temporal cohesive function emphasized by Halliday and Hasan.

The cohesive devices found in the recount texts of SMK NU Ma’arif Jatirejo students generally reflect Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) framework of grammatical cohesion. Their usage helps create textual unity by logically and temporally linking ideas, avoiding repetition, and clarifying participants and events. The absence of more complex forms such as verbal/clausal substitution and ellipsis supports the notion that the students are still developing in their writing competence, often prioritizing clarity and explicitness in storytelling. Thus, the findings support Halliday and Hasan’s theoretical distinctions, while also highlighting how the practical application of these cohesive devices varies according to language proficiency and genre-specific conventions.

IV. Conclusion

This research was conducted to analyze the use of grammatical cohesive devices in the students’ recount texts at SMK NU Ma’arif Jatirejo, Mojokerto. Specifically, it aimed to identify the types of grammatical cohesive devices employed and to explore their meanings in helping students construct coherent and cohesive narratives. The analysis was carried out on 26 student texts collected from eleventh-grade students who had previously studied recount text material.

Based on the findings, it was evident that four types of grammatical cohesive devices were present in the students’ writing: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. However, the distribution of their usage varied significantly. The most frequently used type was reference, especially personal reference (e.g., *I, my, we, he, she, they*), which appeared consistently throughout the texts. This indicates that students tend to recount personal experiences and are able to maintain cohesion by referring back to people, events, or things mentioned previously. Demonstrative references (e.g., *this, those*) were used to point out specific elements in the text, while comparative references (e.g., *other, same*) were found less frequently.

The second most used device was conjunction, which played a vital role in organizing the sequence of events and establishing logical connections between sentences. Students commonly used additive conjunctions (e.g., *and, also*), adversative conjunctions (e.g., *but*), causal conjunctions (e.g., *because, so*), and temporal conjunctions (e.g., *then, after that, finally*). This usage showed their awareness of the chronological and logical structure required in a recount text.

On the other hand, substitution appeared only occasionally, indicating that students still struggle with using this more complex grammatical feature. When it was used, it often served to avoid repetition of nouns or clauses, although the accuracy of its application varied. Ellipsis, which involves omitting elements that are understood from the context, was not found in any of the student texts. This might suggest a limited familiarity or confidence in applying ellipsis, possibly due to a lack of instruction or exposure to advanced cohesive techniques.

In terms of meaning, the grammatical cohesive devices used by students reflect an emerging understanding of how cohesion operates at the sentence and discourse level. The frequent use of references helped students avoid redundancy and maintain clarity, while conjunctions were essential in constructing a well-ordered narrative flow. Although substitution and ellipsis were underused, the presence of at least some examples of substitution reveals that a few students are beginning to experiment with more nuanced cohesion strategies.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that students have a foundational grasp of grammatical cohesive devices, particularly in the use of reference and conjunction. These devices play a significant role in shaping the coherence and cohesion of their recount texts. However, the limited use of substitution

and the absence of ellipsis highlight the need for further instruction and practice. Teachers are encouraged to provide more targeted lessons on various types of grammatical cohesion, with practical writing exercises that allow students to apply these devices in context. Enhancing students' awareness and control over cohesive devices can significantly improve the quality and clarity of their writing, enabling them to express their ideas more effectively in English.

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