

The Future Moro Esl Teachers In Focus: The Use of Cohesive Devices in Their L2 Narrative Writing

Annie Mae C. Berowa

Abstract: Cohesion is one of the fundamental defining characteristics of writing quality. It occurs when comprehension of one element is dependent on another within the text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976 as cited in Kwan & Yunus, 2014). Hence, the use of cohesive devices is essential as they connect ideas between sentences to build a texture. The correct usage of these writing devices leads to a good arrangement of a passage while erroneous use can create difficulty on the part of the readers to comprehend what the writer intends to express in the text. Thus, this study was conducted to investigate the types of cohesive devices found in the English narrative essays among the 30 Moro education students major in English and their erroneous use of these writing devices. There is a need to discover the weaknesses of these potential English teachers with regard to their writing proficiency and quality to address any challenge that may be seen while they are still in the university to better prepare them in the profession that they have chosen. The study was conducted in the university located at the heart of Muslim Mindanao. It was found that the participants had the ability to employ various devices to achieve cohesion in writing. However, excessive use of reference device was discovered compared to other devices that implies imbalance and leads to dull and redundant writing output. Furthermore, erroneous use of cohesive devices was also discovered especially in the personal reference and collocation types.

Keywords: *Cohesion, reference, conjunction, lexical cohesion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

WRITING is perceived by native and non-native speakers of English to be one of the most difficult to learn among the four basic language skills. This suggests that non-native speakers of the target language have to face greater challenge as they are not only required of sufficient linguistic competence but also of adequate knowledge on how discourse segments can be connected all together effectively in a cohesive manner.

Cohesion is one of the fundamental defining characteristics of writing quality. It occurs when comprehension of one element is dependent on another within the text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976 as cited in Kwan & Yunus, 2014). Cohesion can also refer to the available means in the surface forms of the text to signal relations that hold between sentences or clausal

units in the text (Grabe, 1985 as cited in Tangkiengsirisin, 2010). In addition, cohesion is the presence or absence of the linguistic cues in the text that allow the reader to make connections between ideas (Scott, Crossley & McNamara, 2016). Hence, the use of cohesive devices is essential as they connect ideas between sentences to build a texture. The correct usage of these writing devices leads to a good arrangement of a passage while erroneous use can create difficulty on the part of the readers to comprehend what the writer intends to express in the text.

Researchers in the field of language teaching and learning found that errors in the use of cohesive devices are frequent in the writings of English as second and as foreign language (ESL and EFL) learners. Furthermore, researchers discovered that some of these deficient learners are the future English teachers in their respective communities and in their respective countries. Such discovery causes great concern as these prospective language educators might transfer their errors to their soon-to-be learners. Thus, there is a need to investigate the weaknesses of these potential English teachers with regard to their writing proficiency and quality to address any challenge that may be seen while they are still in the university to better prepare them in the profession that they have chosen. This study was conducted to investigate the cohesive writing skills of the future Moro English as second language (ESL) teachers to provide indications of their writing proficiency and quality. By doing such, tangible evidences can be seen as to what these learners have or have not mastered, and what is lacking in their linguistic development in the aspect of writing cohesion. A better understanding of the weaknesses in writing is first required to formulate subsequent steps to improve their target skill. The researcher specifically chose the prospective Moro English teachers in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) as they are expected to provide quality language education to the future generation/s of the Moro people in Mindanao. The English teachers play the key role in making the Moros in the Southern Philippines globally competitive to uplift their socio-economic status. It is a common knowledge that English proficiency is a very important factor in hiring, retention and promotion in any organization around the globe. And if these Moro people can achieve sufficient proficiency in the target language, they may have better chances of getting opportunities, of landing good jobs and of achieving a much better life. If all these can happen, the incidence of poverty, which is seen as one of the

Annie Mae C. Berowa is a graduate student of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics at De La Salle University, Manila (mobile phone: 09092991812 ; e-mail: annie_berowa@dlsu.edu.ph).

root causes of rebellion, and even terrorism, can be minimized if not totally eliminated. In addition, to the knowledge of the researcher, there are no studies yet that explored the writing cohesion of the future Moro English teachers in Muslim Mindanao.

Specifically, this study tried to find answers to the following questions.

1. What types of cohesive devices are employed in the English narrative essays of the Moro education students major in English?
2. What errors in the use of cohesive devices are found in the essays of the participants?

II. METHODOLOGY

The present investigation made use of the writing output of the participants to discover the problems with regard to the use and errors in the cohesive devices. This study was conducted in a university at the heart of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines. The 30 participants for this study were the second year Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English (BSEd-English) students who belong to the three major Moro groups in the country. The choice of the participants was supported by the premise that these students are supposed to be proficient in the four basic skills of the English language, with an emphasis in writing, as they are expected to be the future teachers of the different parts of the ARMM who will mold the future generations of their people. Also, the researcher thinks of having the participants who are in their second year, who still have two more years to finish the degree, to provide enough time for any intervention program or activity to improve their cohesive writing competence based on the results of this study.

The participants were asked to write independently a narrative essay on a particular incident which demonstrated a stage of personal maturity in not less than 300 words within a class period (90 minutes). The use of dictionaries, books and mobile phones were not allowed. The narrative essay was chosen because it is expected to have frequent use of cohesive devices as it is descriptive and sequential in nature (Kwan & Yunus, 2014). The cohesive devices employed and the cohesive errors for all categories and subcategories made by the participants were then categorized and tabulated by referring to Halliday and Hassan's (1976) Cohesion Taxonomy. Since the focus was on cohesive devices and errors only, grammatical and spelling errors in the essays were overlooked and discounted.

III. RESULTS

The results of the study showed that among the 30 participants, there were 21 females and 9 males who were ages 17-19 years old. It was also found that among the participants, 26 were Meranaos, 3 were Maguindanaons and 1 was a Tausog.

A. Cohesive devices

The results reflected the ability of the participants to use different devices to achieve cohesion in their essays. On the basis of the percentage in the different categories, it was

apparent that reference got the highest percentage (72.2%), followed by the conjunctive (17.2%), and then the lexical device (10.6%). Although the students used various types of cohesive devices, it was found that certain types were used more frequently than the others. In this case, the great dominance of reference was already expected since narrative texts employ referential cohesive devices frequently (Gazar, 2006). However, this extreme preference toward reference created a great imbalance that may weaken the quality of the essays of the students. Too much dependence on the use of reference suggests that the students are probably deficient in applying the different target devices to achieve cohesion that can lead to a boring and redundant output.

B. Reference types

Among the three sub-categories, the personal reference type dominated the results (75.2%) followed by the demonstrative type (24.8%). The use of comparative device was not found in the essays of the participants. The huge number of personal reference employed by the participants may be influenced by the topic that they needed to develop. Since the activity requires students to write about their experience that shows maturity, personal references were frequently used to put emphasis on one's self and the people or situation/s involved. And probably, they do not want to repeat the names of the characters in their narration that lead them to utilize different devices under the personal type numerously. The extract below serves as an example on how personal reference was used in the essays of the students.

Extract 1

*When **I** was a kid, **I** was always with **my** mother who is the one taking care of **me**. **She** always makes **me** join on activities that **she** does including the household chores. **She** lets **me** observe on how the things should be done. **I** was always with **her** in times of so many experiences that **she** has.*

Following the personal reference, the demonstrative type is the next sub-category that frequently occurred. This type has the pointing-like function in the flow of the discourse which can be spatial, temporal or discoursal (Chafe, 1994 as cited in Na, 2011). In the essays of the students, demonstratives were used to refer to the immediate context that either precedes or follows.

Extract 2

***This** time, I've observe myself **that** **I** was too dependent on what my parents wants me to become. I tried to make decision with myself and I always hope **that those** decision I made will make it to the prophesy. In times of failure and success of what decision I made, I learn what are **those** things **that** needs to be adjusted.*

And as for the comparative sub-category, it was not evident in the essays of the participants. Comparative references such as *similar*, *different* and *better* among others were not found probably because the students focused only on the specific

events that made them grow without comparing themselves or the events with others. Na (2011) also expressed that even in Korea, comparative references were seldom used by the students.

C. Conjunctive type

The participants for this study demonstrated the ability to use the various types of conjunctive device. The data provided that the additive type is the most frequently used (71.7%) among the four sub-categories of conjunctive device as compared to adversative (17.5%), and causal (10.8%). It was also demonstrated that there was no attempt to use the temporal type. The following extracts present how the students utilized different cohesive devices in their essays.

Extract 3

*I was a lively person, who had many friends **and** we also get in touch with each other most of the time whether it is morning, afternoon **or** even evening. We always find ways to get the chance to hang-out just to play indoor **or** outdoor games it was sort like a habit of mine **as well as** my friends too.*

Extract 4

*In my stay in this university, I suffered **but** I enjoyed. The training here is different, it is like literally survival. Survival in everything, it helps me grow, to be mature and not to be selfish though sometimes I feel like I can't really express myself here because I need to be sensitive in everything to what I say, to what I hear, everything **but** that is fine.*

Extract 5

*My mother left when I was 4 years old she got to abroad to find a job **because** really hard for them to rare and have a good life, my father is a farmer and motor driver, she sacrifices **because** I'm schooling now, when I was a child I forgot the face of my mother, saw her only in picture and I understand this as time goes by, why she left use **because** she do it for our sake.*

The results also suggest that respondents favor strongly the use of one word than phrasal conjunctions such as *on the other hand*, *on the contrary* and *from the perspective of*. As exemplified by the extracts provided, students chose to use *and*, *but* and *because*. This choice of the respondents who favor simpler conjunctive types in their essays could indicate their challenge or uncertainty in the use of conjunctions (Hung and Thu, 2014).

D. Lexical cohesive devices

The study found that collocation type has the highest percentage (73.2%) among the five sub-categories, followed by repetition (15%) and synonym/antonym (11.8%). On the other hand, general word and super-ordinate types were not found in the data. The strong preference to collocation in this study probably suggests that students were able to employ this type of lexical device as they can express their ideas better

than any other device since it is not rule-governed and does not follow pre-arranged pattern. As such, participants had the freedom to regularly use co-occurring words that they believe can effectively convey what they meant. An example of how collocations were reflected in the essays of the students is shown below.

Extract 6

*As cliché as it may be, being here in the Mindanao State University, Marawi is the encounter in my life that brought a **stage of growing up**. I can call it my **chance encounter**. Honestly, I'm not really planning to be here in the university. I just took the **SASE examination** because my family wanted me to. In my stay here, I've encountered **different people, different opinions** and I've met **inspiring instructors** that changed my beliefs.*

In addition, repetition emerged to be the most favored type among the different lexical devices next to collocation. The students seem to repeat words in elaborating their ideas for them to stress a point.

Extract 7

*In my stay in this university, I suffered **but** I enjoyed. The training here is different, it is like literally **survival**. **Survival in everything**, it helps me grow, to be mature and not to be selfish though sometimes I feel like I can't really express myself here because I need to be sensitive in **everything** to what I say, to what I hear, **everything** but that is fine.*

The presence of synonyms was also found in the essays of the students. The said cohesive device was basically used to highlight the ideas being expressed.

Extract 8

*Realizations put me in a cage of **shame** and **humiliation**. Having experienced the **struggle** and **hardship** of earning a single peso, I did not have the face to show my parents, not in its literal way though.*

E. Errors in cohesive devices

In the analysis of this study, it was discovered that some of the cohesive devices were erroneously used by the participants. Most of these errors occurred under the reference types. Moreover, misuse and the lack of cohesive devices to make connections between ideas were seen.

The majority of errors were found in the use of referential devices. The errors include the inconsistency of intersentential and intrasentential use of personal reference and the inappropriate use of the proximity demonstrative. The following extracts are examples of the inaccuracies of the participants with regard to the different types of reference.

Extract 9

At that time when I was just an innocent girl, still ignorant of the reality of life

displayed in front of her, walked in to the gates of her high school life.

Extract 10

It all matters on how we see things and apply it to ourselves.

Extract 11

The parents did not do anything to stop those student who are insulting and having fun with the old woman.

Extract 12

All this dreams and ideals to be exactly like him, standing firm in my thought and always waiting to be nurtured.

The mistakes made by the participants possibly imply that they were not cautious when using reference devices and they lack awareness of what they were referring to in the preceding sentences. In addition, the results showed that frequent errors were made in the use collocation by the participants next to reference. There were inaccurate pairings of words found in the essays of the students. Some of the examples on how students used collocations in their writings are as follows:

Extract 13

In growing up we should realized that life is not always a bouquet of roses.

Extract 14

They don't only teach academics but also life problems.

Extract 15

However, sometimes we must make high decisions and most of the time it is right.

As illustrated, the way students used collocations in their essays probably indicates their deficiency in the vocabulary. The researcher thinks that the manner in which the students collocate were based on approximating the sounds or the rhymes of the words they regularly hear. For example, the *bouquet of roses* was used in which the writer meant *bed of roses*. Another is *life problems* in which the context demands for *life lessons*. The participants may have also used direct translations from their first language to the target language such as *high decisions* in which *fast or quick decisions* might be the one intended. The use of literal translations from L1 to L2 is commonly used as a strategy especially for those who have vocabulary and lexical deficiency.

Moreover, the results indicated that the least number of errors were found in the conjunctive category. The errors discovered were the inappropriate and the redundant use of conjunctions between sentences which do not only ruin the logical connections in the intersentential or intrasentential logical link, but can also create confusions among readers.

Extract 16

There is no doubt that all of us need to make decisions in many situation and depending

on the gravity of these situations, we make either quick decisions or fast decisions.

Extract 17

That time, I feel proud to my science teacher because she have a good heart to help the old woman without thinking the possibility or consequence of what she did.

Extract 18

Though my aunt treated me as her own daughter but however, I feel shy to share my feeling.

Aside from the erroneous use of cohesive devices, the researcher also found other problems in the essays of the students. For one, some students lack conjunctions in expressing their ideas. For example:

Extract 19

Summer before college, I've decided to study a certain university in Bukidnon. One of the reason is that my sister also goes there I went there, took an entrance exam and my sister paid everything for me.

Extract 20

But it was tough for me in adopting the new environment alone I don't have any choice to face it alone.

Furthermore, all the essays analyzed by the researcher did not have the presence of cohesive devices to mark transitions from the introduction, to the body of the paper and to its conclusion. This is of great concern as essays must have these markers to signal the readers on how the ideas are being developed and are being shifted. The absence of these leads readers to misunderstand the thoughts that the writer wants to communicate and creates difficulty in comprehending the text.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of cohesive devices in the essays of the future Moro ESL teachers in Muslim Mindanao and found that participants had the ability to employ various devices to achieve cohesion in writing. However, excessive use of reference device was discovered compared to other devices that implies imbalance and leads to dull and redundant writing output. Furthermore, erroneous use of cohesive devices was also discovered especially in the personal reference and collocation types. The results of this research support the findings made by previous researchers (Mojica, 2006; Yang & Sun, 2012; Ghasemi, 2013; Hung & Thu, 2014) on the use of reference as the most favored type. The study also validated the errors frequently found in the essays of ESL and EFL learners. Moreover, the results of this investigation provides additional findings to the previous studies (Rahman, 2013; and Kwan & Yunus, 2014) as to the weaknesses held by future English language teachers in the different contexts with regard to their cohesion in writing.

With this, the researcher concludes that these future Moro English language educators still have problems in making their writings cohesive. This may mean that their writing proficiency and quality are not yet enough for them to be effective writing teachers in the target language. The number of years that they have received English language instruction, along with their field of specialization in the university, is not enough to meet what is expected and required of them. As already mentioned, English language teachers who are to teach language competencies must be competent themselves first in all skills in language and beyond.

It is recommended that this discovery on the weaknesses of the future language educators must be addressed as early as possible to better equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to be effective in their area of specialization. Additional academic writing instructions can be taken to help enhance the writing quality of these learners. Curriculum planners and university administrators also need to evaluate whether the subjects for English teaching majors are still relevant and responsive to the needs of the learners to prepare them in the world of English language teaching.

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Annie Mae C. Berowa is a graduate student of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics at De La Salle University-Manila, Philippines. She earned her Master of Arts in English Language Teaching in 2012 and Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English in 2004 from the Mindanao State University, Main Campus.