Narrating Personal Reflections Using Cohesive Features as Strategies among Nigerian Language Secondary Students

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Abstract: This paper explores the cohesive features used by Nigerian language secondary students in narrating personal reflections of their junior years. Ten samples texts written by the second language learners were examined using Halliday and Hasan (1976) model of cohesion. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants based on certain criteria: (i) They are above the age of fifteen and (ii) They can read and write in English language. The data collected comprise fifteen essays written in the language classroom. They were given approximately forty-five minutes to reflect on the topic given by the teacher. The findings reveal that the participants used cohesive features as strategies in sharing their experiences as junior students. The most frequent use of cohesive features include: reference, lexical, and conjunction cohesion types which helped to enhance and frame the reflections. In doing so, the narration was smooth without any unnecessary repetitions of words, phrases, and clauses. This further improves the quality of essays in the attempt to convey the intended message to the reader. The findings draw the attention to the significance of having more knowledge of cohesive features by students in particular the non-native students of English and how to effectively use such features in their written communication to enable them to develop their stories (reflections). The paper recommends that future studies can explore how effective use of cohesive devices as writing strategies help in improving other language learners' of English written texts. This further improves the quality of essay in the attempt to convey the intended message to the reader. The paper ends with some implications for teaching and learning of second language writing.

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing number of studies on the use and effects of cohesion and coherence in writing by native and non-native speakers of English language across the globe   [9, 23]. However, studies on how second language learners use cohesive devices to develop and narrate stories tend to be limited, and are rarely neglected specifically among Nigerian secondary school students. This study thus explores how second language learners of English use cohesive devices in their essays in the constrained environment, that is, the classroom situation. More specifically, the paper examines the types of cohesive features attempted by the selected students' in narrating their reflections of junior years. In Nigeria, English language is considered a second language for most of the populace and in academic contexts [11]. Given that writing still remains the most challenging skill of language that second language learners are confronted with in their academic pursue. Acquiring the skill of writing tends to be a highly demanding task than acquiring the other language skills particularly among the non-native speakers of English language [13]. Similarly, constructing a piece of written text in English language by a second language learner needs adequate knowledge of how to use cohesive features particular as writing strategies, such strategies can help enhance the quality of written texts as they can effectively convey the intended information to the target reader without making the text boring [5, 10, 17, 18].

II. COHESION AND WRITING

With regards to ESL essay writing cohesion, a number of studies opined that cohesion, on a micro level is concerned with connecting statements, clauses, and phrases together [16]. While, cohesion on the macro level dealt with connecting different sets of ideas in one particular text. As such, as a property of text cohesion is a crucial element for students to understand when they attempt to write an effective essay. However, several previous studies indicated that the use of cohesion in writing forms a great challenge to second language

learners of English [19, 10] across the globe including Nigeria. First and foremost, [4] investigated the frequency and distribution of cohesion devices across registers in writings. The study used three texts for the analysis, namely, legal, short story, and newspaper articles. The result showed that lexical cohesive devices dominate the texts than the other kinds of cohesion types that were found within the three sample texts. [2] examined the confronting problems in using cohesion and coherence by students in their English as a foreign language EFL essay writing. The study employed the mixed-method approach which includes the use of questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The findings demonstrate that the students are confronted with series of problems in using cohesion and coherence in their writings that lead to the unnecessary repetitions of words, phrases, and clauses in their written communication. [23] explored the specific differences and similarities in the use of cohesive elements in the native speakers and non-native speakers' corpus. The study used the quantitative approach with one hundred and sixty one texts as the sample data. The study reveals that the non-native speakers use conjunction and lexical cohesion than native speakers. [1] examined the use of cohesive devices by the undergraduate students in their argumentative essay. The research used a mixed-method approach and with sixty four essays as sample data. The quantitative result shows that the reference cohesion has the highest percentage of occurrences of more than ninety-percent than the other kinds of cohesion. Similarly, the qualitative result reveals that cohesive types such as adversative conjunctions were used by the students to establish counterclaims. [24] described the use of conjunctions in the European union EU documents in the organizations of the texts. A corpus-based analysis was used to examine the sample texts. The result reveals many data-driven instructional activities that are helpful in EFL/ESL classrooms. [14] explored how native and non-native speakers use connectors in their English writing. The study used qualitative approach in its data collection and analysis respectively. The findings show that the connectors are not overuse by the learners. [17] Harman (2013) investigated how the use of lexical cohesion helps in enhancing ESL students' writings. The study employed a qualitative approach to aid its data collection and analysis. It demonstrates how the students use repetitions and synonyms in their writing which indicate the use of lexical cohesion. [9] examined how the use of cohesion and linguistics markers helps in enhancing the proficiency of second language writing among non-native speakers. The quantitative approach is used for collecting and analyzing the data which comprise two hundred essays, the study shows that the second language writers who are considered competent writers do not use more cohesive elements in writing than the use of linguistics markers. [26] investigated how efficient EFL students at university level of education use cohesive devices in constructing their written texts. Questionnaires and sample of essays were collected. The research found that the students have no adequate knowledge of how to use the cohesive markers in writing. [25] explored how lexical cohesions are embedded in the work of John Cheever's *The Five-Forty Eight*. The text is novel written by John Cheever. A qualitative method approach was used in analyzing the sample text. The study reveals how the effective use of lexical cohesion in the text helps the writer in conveying unified information within the context of the text.

In Nigerian, similar studies on the use of cohesion and coherence in writing are reviewed. First and foremost, [22] examined the use of various forms of conjunctions in the language students writing. The study used a quantitative approach in the collection and analysis of the data. The result reveals that there was no significant difference in the use of other conjunctions such as temporal and demonstratives conjunctions. The study suggests that English teachers need to give more attention and effort in teaching the students how to use conjunctions in writing for the purpose of connectivity of information. [5] explored how cohesive elements are embedded in the labor texts with special reference to academic staff union of universities minutes of meetings. A qualitative method approach was used to analyze the five samples of the written minutes of meetings. The study found that three types of cohesive devices namely; lexical, reference and substitution are dominant in the samples texts.[6] examined how Nigerian school students used language to communicate self and other relations in their English language writing. A qualitative approach was employed in exploring the ways in which the students portray their selves and other in written communication. Fifteen sample of students narration was used as the main data. The study reveals three themes, namely; appreciation as an indicator of relating self to the other, salutation as an initiator to relate to other, and caring as a way of appreciating the other. The study recommends that future researchers can examine how the phenomenon of self and other relations are embedded in ESL writing of undergraduate or post graduate students across the globe. [21] examined how lexical cohesion reflects writers' tones in the Nigerian newspaper editorials. A qualitative approach was used to examine the thirty two editorials from four Nigerian newspapers. The four newspapers were *the Guardian, the Nation, Leadership, and Vanguard* newspapers. The findings show that repetition as a cohesive type appeared to be dominant in most of the editorials than the other cohesive types.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used fifteen samples of narrative texts written by Nigerian secondary school students in particular form five students of a public school in Adamawa state, Nigeria. In an effort of identifying the participants for this study, we used purposive sampling technique based on the criteria of their age and

educational level [15, 3, 8, 7]. The study was conducted between July-September, 2017. The selected participants did the written essay in a classroom where they were asked to reflect on their experiences as a junior secondary school student. The length of the essay should not be more than three hundred and fifty words and the duration for the writing task was forty-five minutes which was the class time. The narratives were written in English language as the students were taught in the language since their senior primary school years. The participants who comprise of male and female students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years old, consist of Muslims and Christians and the dominant tribes of the students namely; Fulani, Hausa, Yandang, Chamba, Mumuye, and some few Yorubas and Igbos. In analyzing the written narratives, [16] model's of cohesion was referred to as the theoretical framework of the study.

IV. FINDINGS

The study reveals three emerging themes from the written narrations of the selected students. The themes include: (a) Using reference cohesion (b) Displaying lexical cohesion (c) Using varieties of connectors.

Theme One: Using Reference Cohesion

The most dominant cohesive type found in the texts is the use of reference cohesion as demonstrated in the excerpt of students' narratives:
S1: I have a colleague called *Paul* a very caring and nice boy. *He* used to gives me a wonderful advice on how to go with my studies…
S3: with the financial and moral support from my beloved *parents,* I must work hard and appreciate *them*…
S5: I was appointed as the class monitor by my *form master* because of my performance in class activities, *he* loves me…
S7: I was trapped with the love of one *female student* which occupied my heart always I am thinking of *her*…
S9: As a new student in the school, I enjoyed the necessary guidance given to me by my *brother* who is an old student. In fact, I am grateful to *him*…
S11: the belief of my *ethnic people* that female education is not accepted. According to *them*girls are expected to marry and take care of the children…
S13: recently our *law makers* have wake up on that challenge… *they* started looking on the existing *laws* with the intention of working on *them*…
S15: Our *teachers* are nice people, *they* listen to our problems and advice us accordingly…

Noted: S= referred to student

Source: From the original students' sample essays.
The excerpts drawn from the students' written stories revealed how each of the participants construct his or her writing using reference cohesion markers when reflecting on their points. This helps to enhance the quality of the written essay in which unnecessary repetitions of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences are avoided. The cohesive features can make the writing less boring to the intended reader. For instance, student (S1) uses personal pronoun *he* to refer back to *Paul* which helps him not to repeat the use of the same proper noun in the same text. In the second narration, S3 demonstrates the use of plural personal pronoun *them* pointing backward to the use of noun *parents* is another style of avoiding repeat the word, *parent* using a reference cohesive to tie in the idea well in a written text. Similarly, S5 used singular personal pronoun, *he,* to replace the compound noun, *form master* in the same text to make the text more interesting to the reader. S7 also used pronoun *her* to refer back to the compound noun *female student* as anaphoric reference cohesion. Another use of pronoun *him* as a cohesive reference is demonstrated by S9 for the proper noun *brother* in the text with the sole aim of not constantly continue repeating the use of the proper noun. S11 used the plural personal pronoun *them* in constructing their idea/reflecting the experience. The word is substituted with the existing compound noun *ethnic people* in the text. Similarly, personal pronoun *they* is used by S13 in writing to refer back to the common noun *law makers* in the narration to connect the information using the reference cohesion tie. The written text by S15 showed how the pronoun *they* is used to refer back to the noun *teachers* as anaphoric reference cohesion tie.

Theme Two: Display Lexical Cohesion

The sample essays used lexical cohesion in constructing the idea of narrating reflections by some participants. The writers used synonyms (lexical cohesion) to enrich the quality of the written narrations as demonstrated in the excerpts:
S2: Certainly, my experiences as a result of coming in contact with many people of different background assist in changing my earlier thinking that *Islam* is a *religion t*hat promotes violence not peace.

S6: As a Christian, I have many *friends* who are Muslims and also my *boyfriend* is a Muslim and he loves and cares for me…

S10: I also involved in some *small businesses* like *laundry and road side mechanic* every weekends…

S14: the activities of these youths creates in security and fair to the students in the school campus. The *activities* include: *raping, kick napping, and assassination*…

S4:   As student, I also participate in *sporting activities* such as *basketball, football, long tennis, and high jump*…

S8: I am privilege to come in contact with different people from different faith and *tribes* suchas *Igbos, Yorubas, Fulani, and Tivs*…

It is clearly evident from the above extracts that the participants used lexical cohesions to explain their reflections about school activities. The excerpts demonstrate how the students used their knowledge of English vocabulary to construct effective written texts that conform to the use of lexical cohesion in conveying their own personal experiences. S2 substituted the word *Islam* with the word *religion* as a synonym which illustrates the use of lexical cohesion. In another narration, S6 replaces the word *Friend* with *boyfriend* which is similar in meaning with the later word as it is used in the context of the sample text as another pattern of demonstrating the use of lexical cohesion by the writer. S10 substitutes the use of the compound word *small businesses* as it is used in the text by the writer with the words *laundry and road side mechanic* within the same text and conveyed the same meaning to the reader. Similarly, the word *activities* used by S14 was replaced within the body of the text with words *raping, kick napping and assassination* and maintained the original meaning of the text to the reader. S4 uses the act of synonym as one form of lexical cohesion in writing as illustrated by substituting the use of the compound word *sporting activities* with words such as *basketball, football, long tennis, and high jump*. Finally, the study found the use of lexical cohesion through synonym in making the text more interesting as demonstrated by S8 with these words *Igbos, Yorubas, Fulanis, and Tivs* instead of the word *tribes* as used earlier in the text. In this regard, the use of the synonyms in writing helped in reflecting back to the identity of the writer.

Theme Three: Using the Varieties of Connectors

The third theme concerns the participants using additive, adversative, and causal connectors in writing to communicates how they reflects about their school experience as illustrated in the following narratives:

S12: There was a time one of the teachers attempted to rape me in his office, I had to scream.   *However* with   God be the glory I have not been the victim of his evil act.

S9: I have able to finish my junior secondary school education *and* proceed to senior   secondaryschool level.

S5: *In addition,* as a Muslim using the communicative skills of the three languages will help me in my Da'awa program.

S3: It has come to the level that I cannot continue with my studies in school *because* my parents cannot afford to pay my school fees.

From the narratives above, the study found that the participants used connectors in their writings to signal relations that can provide details understanding of other segment of the text. First and foremost, the use of adversative conjunction is found in the essay written by S12 with the help of using the word *however* in order to show an existing relation between the first and the second part of the text. The word *and* in italic convey the use of addictive conjunction by S9 in writing and it indicates the additional information to the previous one. Similarly, S5 used the conjunction *in addition* to provide additional information to the target reader as an addictive conjunction. Finally, the use of the word *because* was found used by S3 in a written text as causal conjunction to communicates reasons of embarking on a particular action to the reader. The writers used the varieties of conjunctions to enable them to connect their experiences as they reflect it through writing.

V. DISCUSSION

The study discusses three themes emerging from the participants written narratives. The themes are: using reference cohesion, display lexical cohesion, and using the varieties of connectors.

Theme one, "using reference cohesion" explores how the participants used pronouns as the reference cohesive tie in their writing. This is to avoid repeating the use of other words that can be replaced easily with pronouns, for instance, proper and common nouns. The pronouns used include: he/Paul, them/parents, he/form master, her/female student, him/brother, them/ethnic people, they/law-makers, and they/teachers. In this regard, the result of this study share the findings with other studies in relation to the use of pronouns such as personal pronouns as a reference cohesive tie in writing [4, 1, 23, 5]. Mean while, theme two, "displaying lexical cohesion" demonstrates how the student-writers used lexical cohesion as a strategy in constructing their writing. The study reveals that the use of synonyms by most of the student-writers helps to construct ideas better as shown in the written narratives of S2, S6, S10, and S4. The examples of these synonyms are: Islam/religion, friends/boyfriend, small businesses/laundry, road side mechanic, activities/basketball, football, long tennis, high

jump, tribes/Igbos, Yorubas, Fulanis, and Tivs. The finding of this paper aligns with other studies that highlight the use of synonyms as lexical cohesion in writing [17, 20,21, 25].

Theme three, which is, "using the varieties of connectors", students' used conjunctions to make reference to the other parts of the written text for the purpose of linking the points in relations to their experiences as it is reflected by them. The dominant types of conjunctions found in most of the sample narratives are adversative, addictive, and causal conjunctions. The conjunctives words found in the essays include: however, and, in addition, because which plays the role of connectors in the form of adversative, addictive, and causal. The findings are similar to studies which also highlight the use of connectors in academic writings specifically the use adversative, addictive, and causal conjunctions in writings [14, 22, and 24].

VI. CONCLUSION

The study has explored how cohesive features were used by the student-writers to narrate their reflections. The study found three emerging themes from the student essays which include using reference cohesion, displaying lexical cohesion, and using varieties of connectors. Similarly, the sample texts reveal that the writers used anaphoric reference (a cohesion device) in constructing their ideas more than the other type of reference cohesion such as normal substitution. Also, the use of synonyms dominated the texts through the use of lexical cohesion than the other categories of lexical cohesion. The findings show that the participants used varieties of connectors in their essays such as adversative, addictive, and causal conjunction. The study can have an impact in the area of pedagogy where teachers can share the knowledge and students' understanding of cohesive features. It can also sensitize ESL/EFL learners, English teachers, syllabus developers, and novice writers on the phenomenon of using cohesive devices in writing academic texts to make sense of the story. It is recommended that future studies seek to explore how cohesive devices are embedded in other genres of writing particularly written speeches or published articles. Similarly, studies can also be done by interviewing the students after producing the written narratives.

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