“Anti-Texture” Agents in the Written English Essays of Students in a Ghanaian University

Benjamin Amoakohene
Corresponding Authors’ Email: bamoakohene@uhas.edu.gh
Department of General and Liberal Studies, University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ghana

Osei Yaw Akoto
Email: oseiyaw.akoto@yahoo.com
Department of English, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana

Pethias Siame
Email: psiame@yahoo.com
Department of Literature and Languages, Kwame Nkrumah University, Zambia

Humphrey Kapau
Email: humphreykapau@gmail.com
Department of Literature and Languages, University of Zambia, Zambia

Abstract

Texture proves to be a key indicator for measuring the quality of a text but establishing this text quality is a challenge for most English as a Second Language (ESL) students. This challenge has led to an array of studies to find the root cause(s) of this/these writing challenge(s) of ESL students. Despite these numerous studies, there is still paucity of research on “anti-texture” agents in the written English essays of students from the Ghanaian context, especially those at the tertiary level. In filling this gap, this study uses Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive theory as a framework to explore the types of cohesive errors that serve as “anti-texture” agents in 150 written English essays of students from a Ghanaian university. Because of the highly descriptive nature of this current investigation, it uses the qualitative content analysis as its design. The findings show that challenges like unclear pronoun references, wrong selection of cohesive devices, over usages of one cohesive device within the same textual environments, wider textual distances between references and their referents, the omission of cohesive devices, wrong insertions of cohesive devices and references lacking referents served as barriers to ESL students quest to use cohesive devices as means of creating texture in their texts. The findings further confirmed that the inappropriate use of cohesive devices in the students’ essays disrupted the free flow of information and as such, rendered the essays incoherent. The study has pedagogical implication for ESL academic writing instructors and curriculum developers.

Keywords: Texture, Anti-texture, Cohesion, Coherence, Systemic Functional Linguistics
INTRODUCTION

Language, undoubtedly, is an essential component for the survival of members of every discourse community. This emanates from the fact that “every social organisation requires some means through which members can communicate with one another” (Noah and Olagbemi, 1998:1) and the most dominant means, especially within the human society and the academic discourse community to be specific, is via language. Thus, language is the most powerful and versatile means through which humans engage with one another (Gumperz, 1968). This statement by Gumperz (1968) presupposes that humans cannot function effectively if they cannot speak the language of the environment or the discourse community in which they find themselves.

In order to be classified as a competent speaker of a language, one must demonstrate knowledge in four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Despite the importance of these four language skills in the academic lives of students, Afriani (2018) sees writing as the most significant and complex skill that students need to acquire in order to go through their academic journey successfully. In other words, the academic discourse community requires students to demonstrate high level of competence in writing in a more specialised way by summarising and expanding upon meanings alongside categorising, taxonomising and presenting ideas to various levels of abstractness (Maton, 2020). Students are further required to organise and connect sentences into logical structures which can be achieved through grammatical cohesion, lexical organisation, thematic patterning and participant tracking and “it is this collection of resources that when combined with other meanings create a synthesis called texture” (Bowen and Thomas, 2020:1). These highly sophisticated writing requirements of students make academic writing “a complex and demanding activity in which students have to regulate their (meta) cognitive, motivational and linguistic processes” (Nickcevic-Milkovic et al., 2020:100).

Because of the complexity of the writing task within the academic setting, most ESL and EFL students struggle to produce texts that meet the high writing standards set up by academic writing experts at the university level. This difficulty emanates from the fact that writing in second and foreign languages require students to “learn a new set of writing skills that may be different from their first language” (Seed et al., 2022:106). Other researchers link these writing challenges of students to lack of qualified teachers, text books and the absence of reading culture (Gyasi, 1990); the predominant use of pidgin by ESL students (Dako et al., 1997); poor teaching and learning of English at the university level (Mireku-Gyimah, 2014); lack of linguistics and general literacy background of students as well as the poor attitudes of students towards academic writing (Pineteh, 2013) and inadequate time apportioned to the teaching of academic literacy to ESL students at the university level (Amoakohene, 2017).

Based on these backgrounds, ESL/EFL students normally display a high level of inadequate writing performance, especially in writing texts that demonstrate connectivity and logical connections. In other words, both ESL/EFL students, as far as academic writing is concerned, are not only limited in generating and organising ideas but also struggle to translate notions and ideas to “legible text” (Richards & Renandya, 2002:1), a situation that leads to lack of flair and sophistication in students writing especially at the university level (Amua-Sekyi, 2000). Findings from researches conducted on challenges of students writing, especially within the ESL/EFL contexts, project inter language and mother tongue interference errors (Sarfraz, 2011), inappropriate use of subordination (Adjei, 2015), wrong usage of register (Mireku-Gyimah, 2014), errors in the use of tense, prepositions, articles, omission and misordering in composing adjectives (Listiani, 2014); wrong usage of relative pronouns and morphology (Hamdi, 2005); errors in the use of punctuation marks (Khansir,2013); mechanical, structural and grammatical errors (Qui-
Catabay, 2016); errors in line with ambiguity (Amoakohene, 2017) and errors in the use of cohesive devices (WidatAllah, 2021; Rusdiah and Malombassang, 2019) as the main writing problems that plague the essays of most ESL/EFL students.

Although all these errors need to be addressed by ESL and EFL students and instructors, one pressing challenge that needs to be given serious consideration is students inability to maintain cohesion in their written English essays. The inability of ESL/EFL students to produce cohesive texts needs urgent attention in the sense that connectivity in texts, which is created through the use of cohesive devices, is an important indicator for measuring the quality and comprehensibility of a text (Sekwo, 2020). Cohesive devices therefore, create what Crossley et. al (2014) term as interrelationship, which to a large extent, enables the reader to draw inferences that are very critical in text comprehension. To be more specific, the appropriate use of cohesive devices in texts reduces the processing load in the mind of the reader as it provides “surface indicators” (Sekwo, 2020: 36) for the reader.

Other scholars like Malah et.al (2016), Crossley, Kyle and McNamara (2016), Yang and Sun (2012) and Akindele (2011) confirm that the attainment of text cohesion is a measure of text quality. On the contrary, scholars like Ralf (2018), Almaden (2006), Shahriar and Pathan (2012), Zhang (2000) and Carrell (1982) opine that cohesive devices have no correlation with text cohesion and the comprehensibility. We are not in support of this opposing view in the literature as we strongly believe that “cohesion is the doorway to coherence and as such, coherence is the fruit we reap after the seeds of cohesion (cohesive devices) have appropriately and effectively been planted”(Amoakohene, 2020:38) in a text. Amoakohene (2020) further opines that it is only when the seeds of cohesion are not rightly and effectively planted within a text that the fruit of incoherence will be reaped. Thus, when these cohesive devices are wrongly used in texts they serve as “anti-texture” agents, a situation which impedes the free flow of information.

The essential role that cohesive devices play in text comprehensibility establishes the need for adequate research into writing challenges that serve as impediments to ESL students quest to make use of cohesive devices as texture creation tools in their written English essays. This study therefore has as its main focus to explore the type of cohesive errors that serve as “anti-texture” agents in the written English essays of first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students at the University of Cape Coast.

Conceptualizing Texture

One concept that has recently burgeoned within the applied linguistics literature is texture, which is considered by linguists and writing experts as a trade mark for measuring the quality of a text. Without texture in a text, writers may find it difficult to establish shared meaning with their readers, a situation that has made texture very popular in the ESL/EFL classrooms. The popularity of this concept within the ESL/EFL classrooms stems from the fact that it is that category of students that mostly find difficulty in maintaining fluidity in their texts (Amoakohene, 2020). Most linguists are of the view that a text is not just a mere random accumulation of sentential units but it should exhibit the property of texture (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

Texts that have texture have unity in their linguistics choices which are considered by readers as appropriate within the socio-cultural and discourse environment that these texts inhabit (Forey and Thompson, 2008). Unity within this context is the “multitude of interlocking choices of meaning and wording” (Forey and Thompson, 2008:1) which are considered to be mutually important and communicate meaning within the context of their usage. Crane (2006) sees texture as anything within a text that makes it meaningful and coherent. It is the “basis for unity and
semantic interdependence within a text and a text without texture would just be a group of isolated sentences with no relationship to one another” (Crane, 2006:131). From Crane’s (2006) point of view, texture in text occurs when the text exhibits properties of coherence and cohesion. Unlike Crane (2006) who opines that the textuality of a text can be achieved when a text exhibits the properties of coherence and cohesion, Alamiri (2020) argues that the textuality of a text can be achieved solely through text internal items called cohesive devices. However, these cohesive devices can maintain texture in texts only when they are appropriately used within the right contexts and textual environment. The inappropriate use of these cohesive devices might distort the fluidity and logical flow within a text and hence, makes that text loses its texture. Within the context of this study, the phrase anti-texture agents is operationalised as any linguistic manifestations that distort the connectivity, logical flow and fluidity in texts.

Cohesion in Applied Linguistics

Cohesion, within the applied linguistics literature, is considered as a “non-structural text forming relations” (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:7) that exist within a text. It relates to the semantic ties that are formed to connect sentential units as a unified whole (Amoakohene and Afful, 2021). Crane (2006) distinguishes between cohesion and coherence by intimating that contextual meaning at the paragraph level is what is termed as coherence whilst the internal properties of meaning within the paragraph is termed as cohesion, which can be achieved through linguistics resources known as cohesive devices. Within the Systemic Functional Linguistic domain, cohesion falls under the textual metafunction and Kadiri et al. (2016) make reference to it as a concept which explores the grammatical and lexical relationship within a text. This presupposes that cohesion in texts can be achieved through the use of both lexical and grammatical cohesive devices. As posited by Amoakohene (2020), grammatical cohesion constitutes four main types and these include references, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction.

Crane (2006) defines referencing as a grammatical cohesive device type that is used in a text to retrieved presupposed information and they must be identifiable for it to be considered as cohesion. In other words, references introduce interlocutors in a stretch of discourse and keep track of them throughout the entire text (Eggins, 1994). As stressed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), references manifest in three forms and these include personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference. Personal reference serves as connective agent in a text through the use of personal pronouns like he, him, she, her etc. whilst demonstrative reference keeps track of anaphoric relation through proximity reference, like this, these, that, those, here, there, then and the. Comparative reference on the other hand, keeps track of identity and similarity through the use of indirect reference like adjectives and adverbs.

Alamiri (2020) sees ellipsis as a universal property of any natural language and its function in a text is based on the recoverability of a linguistic unit within a stretch of text from a preceding part of that text. This, therefore, result in an establishment of an anaphoric relation that binds parts of the text together. Ellipsis, therefore, involves the omission of words or phrases whose meaning can be deduced from a given context (Varhanek, 2007). According to Alamiri (2020), ellipsis has an interrelated link with substitution as they both project connectivity between parts of sentential units which manifest in replacing a linguistic unit within a text. It is, therefore, not surprising that Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to ellipsis as a substitution by zero. The two grammatical concepts consist of three sub-types to reflect their grammatical functions. Thus, substitution can manifest in the form of verbal substitution, nominal substitution and clausal substitution whilst ellipsis can also be grouped into three forms: verbal ellipsis, clausal ellipsis and nominal ellipsis. Unlike
reference, ellipsis and substitution, conjunctions main communicative function within a text is to describe the cohesive tie between clauses or sections of a text in order to demonstrate a meaningful connection between them (Adeyemi, 2017). To be more specific, conjunctions do not create ties within a text by anaphoric means but rather connect sentential units because of the unique quality they possess in connoting their unique meaning. Conjunction can create ties within a text through additive conjunction, adversative conjunction, causal conjunction and temporal conjunction (Brown and Yule, 1983). Adeyemi (2017) intimates that additive conjunction’s main function within a text is to further the discourse topic through linguistic units like and, also, again, further, etc.; adversative conjunction establishes an occurrence that is contrary to the speaker or reader’s expectation; temporal conjunction links parts of a given discourse by signalling sequence or time whilst causal conjunction expresses result, reason and purpose.

Unlike grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion focuses on ties that are created in texts through the use of vocabulary such as repetition/reiteration, collocation, hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy and meronymy. Crane (2006) group lexical cohesion into two broad categories and these are reiteration and collocation. From the point of view of Halliday and Hasan (1976), reiteration manifests in the form of repeating lexical items either directly or by making use of synonym, general words, or superordinate. Collocation on the other hand manifests when a pair of words are not necessarily dependent upon the same semantic relation but tend to naturally occur within the same lexical environment.

Empirical Studies
As a key indicator of text quality, cohesion has attracted wider attention in the linguistics and applied linguistics literature. One aspect of these researches has looked at challenges that non-native speakers, especially ESL/EFL students face in their quest to use cohesive devices as means of maintaining texture in their texts.

Prominent among these studies is Fengjie et al. (2014) who explored the syntactic problem on coherence in 114 college students’ written English texts. The findings showed that college students at the Tianjin University of Finance and Economics in China have challenges in writing suitable syntactic structures and as such, are susceptible to separating words that are syntactically closer to each other. Aside from these, they also make use of pronouns with ambiguous references and dangling modifiers.

El-Gazzar (2006) also explored the correct and incorrect use of different lexical connectors in the expository essays of 40 Arab advanced academic writing students. The cohesive scale that was used to assess the students’ essays include repetition, references, synonyms, hyponymy, antonymy, inclusion, derivations/inflections and collocation. The results showed that the students’ essays were characterised by weak lexical cohesion due to their inability to make use of a variety of lexical connectors. Other challenges that were identified in the essays were linked to the existence of long-distance between cohesive ties in a chain as well as uncertain references that lead to misinterpretation. This writing challenge is also confirmed in Fengjie et al. (2014) as unclear pronouns with vague references.

Closely related to the aforementioned studies, Faradhibah and Nur (2017) explored the difficulties that students in the Department of English Education and the Teaching Science Faculty of the UIN Alauddin Makassar face in maintaining cohesion and coherence in their written English essays. The data set comprised 36 written English essays as well as an interview data. The findings revealed that the students lack competence in making precise and accurate topic sentences as well as fulfilling supporting details for their paragraphs. Aside from these, the students struggled to
make use of transitional words to construct logical and meaningful sentences and these transitional words were sometimes overused.

Again, Seken and Suarnajaya (2013) explored cohesion and coherence in 30 written English essays by students at the Labuapi West Lombok. Although these scholars have three broad research foci – (1) the type of cohesive device used, (2) the type of topical progression and (3) the problem of cohesion – it is the last research question that is relevant to the sub-theme under review. By making use of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive theory, Seken and Suarnajaya (2013) observed that the essays were characterised by inappropriate use of references, conjunctions, lexical cohesion, tenses, the auxiliary “to be”, passive voice, infinitive, gerund, subject-verb agreement, noun and preposition. Seken and Suarnajaya (2013) intimate that these challenges are as a result of students’ lack of knowledge in grammar and vocabulary which makes them incompetent in applying the rules of usage of the grammar of English in their essays.

To add up to the above reviewed studies, Adika (2010) explored the infelicitous use of the demonstrative pronoun “this” as an anaphoric reference in 179 Ghanaian undergraduate students’ essays. Adika (2010) spotlighted challenges like ambiguous co-reference, extensive use of the demonstrative pronoun “this” as well as instances of wider textual distance between the demonstrative pronoun “this” and its references. Adika (2010) further proposes practical intervention measures like the need for language teachers to help address the fundamental issue of re-conceptualisation through vocabulary development and expanded reading.

Within the same Ghanaian context, Mensah (2014) studied instances of cohesion in the essays of final-year Senior High School students at Accra Academy. The study specifically explored inter-sentential cohesion as well as challenges that these Ghanaian Senior High School students face in making use of cohesive devices. By exploring 45 written English essays of these students, Mensah (2014) confirms that the students have problems in making use of references, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Specifically, these cohesive devices were overused in the students’ essays, and this resulted in monotony in the students’ written essays. The overuse of cohesive devices as a key finding in Mensah’s (2014) study confirms earlier studies like Adika (2010) and El-Gazzer (2006).

On another account, Hajalzen (2017) investigated the difficulties encountered by university students in using cohesive devices in their written English texts. By making use of the descriptive analysis method as well as Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive theory, Hajalzen (2017) analysed 40 essays written by students from the College of Language and Translation at the Alrebat University. The findings showed that most of the students were unfamiliar with some types of cohesive devices, especially substitution and references. The study also revealed that the students were fond of misusing most of the cohesive devices and this transpired in the form of unnecessary repetition and wrong selection of some cohesive devices in their essays.

Last but not least, Olateje (2006) examined cohesive devices in the essays written by students at the Ooni Girls High School at Osun State, Nigeria. Making use of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive theory to analyse 40 essays written by these students, Olateje (2006) observed that the students were not able to make use of variety of cohesive devices and the cohesive devices that they were able to employ in their essays lacked adequate coordination and sentence linkers.

The empirical studies above give a clear indication that challenges of ESL/EFL students in the use of cohesive devices as texture creation agents have attracted wider scholarly attention. However, it is evident from these reviewed studies that few of them have focused on cohesion challenges of Ghanaian undergraduate students, especially those at the first-year. To the best of the knowledge of the researchers of this current investigation, studies that have explored this theme
within the Ghanaian context, include Adika (2010) and Mensah (2014). Adika’s (2010) work focused only on infelicitous use of the demonstrative pronoun *this* in the essays of first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students of the University of Ghana whilst Mensah (2014)’s study focused on the cohesive challenges of final-year senior high school students at Accra Academy. The point of divergent of Adika’s (2010) and Mensah’s (2014) studies and that of this current one is in line with their focuses. Thus, unlike Adika (2010) and Mensah (2014) whose research focuses have been highlighted above, this present investigation specifically focuses on all instances of cohesive errors in the essays of first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students from the University of Cape Coast.

**METHOD**

**Design, Corpus and Procedures**

This paper uses the qualitative content analysis which is seen by Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1278) as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of a text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. In other words, qualitative content analysis is “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analysis rules and step by step models without rash quantification” (Patton, 2002:453). It is a research method that prioritises the context of a text in its interpretation of raw data. Thus, it offers researchers the opportunity to comprehend social reality in subjective but scientific manner (Zhang et al., 2005). Qualitative content analysis, as stressed by Zhang et al. (2005), can manifest in the form of conceptual analysis and rational analysis. However, this study specifically uses conceptual content analysis which explores the existence and frequency of a concept or concepts in texts. In other words, the study uses conceptual content analysis because its approaches in text analysis is in line with the focus of this current investigation, which explores instances of cohesive errors and their frequencies in the written English essays of first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students.

For materials, we used 150 English expository essays written by first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast. We first used the non-probability sampling procedure, specifically purposive sampling, to select 300 essays each written by first-year students of the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Health and Allied Sciences. These essays were written during the 2021/2022 second semester Communicative Skills exams for all first-year students of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. We then applied the probability sampling procedure, specifically the random sampling, to select fifty scripts each from the pool of essays gathered from these three Faculties. In all, a total of 150 essays served as the corpus for this study. We have to stress that the data for this study was not cleaned and as such, all errors made by the students in their essays were not altered. Extracts from the Faculty of Arts were given the code FAs whilst that of the Health and Allied Sciences and the Social Sciences were given the codes HAS and FSS respectively.

In analysing the data, we used Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive taxonomy as a framework to identify instances of cohesive devices. We specifically focused on instances of cohesive errors in the data and further categorised them into themes. The number of cohesive error types were counted in terms of percentage. We need to stress that the formula we used for calculating the percentage of cohesive errors in the essays was a modified version of Sudijono’s (2012) formula for calculating the percentage of cohesive devices in texts as indicated below:
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this aspect of the paper, we discuss the type of cohesive errors that plague the essays of the first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students and as such, served as blockade in these students quest to use cohesive devices to create texture in their written English essays. After a thorough analysis of the data, we identified instances of inappropriate use of cohesive devices, and these instances have been broadly categorized under seven themes: unclear pronoun references, wrong selection of cohesive devices, over usage of one cohesive device within the same textual environment, wider textual distances between references and their referents, omission of cohesive devices, wrong insertions of cohesive devices, and references lacking referents. Details of these cohesive errors are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Cohesive Error Types in the Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Cohesive Errors</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Health &amp; Allied Sciences</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Per. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unclear Pronoun References</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong Selection of Cohesian Devices</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over Usage of one Cohesian Device within the same Textual Environment</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider Textual Distances between References and their Referents</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission of Cohesian Devices</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong Insertions of Cohesian Devices</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References Lacking Referents</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>1516</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidence from Table 1 indicates that there were 1516 instances of cohesive errors in the first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students essays and these were dominant in the Social Sciences Corpus which is followed by the Arts Corpus. Across the three corpora, it was observed that the Health and Allied Sciences Corpus recorded the least instances of cohesive errors. This is not
It is surprising because the grade point of entry into Health and Allied Sciences programmes are very high to the extent that it takes brilliant students who might as well be good in writing to gain admission into the Health and Allied Sciences Programmes. This is unlike the Social Science and Arts programmes whose grade points for admission are relatively lower as compared to that of the programmes run at the Health and Allied Sciences Faculty.

There were a lot of instances where students showed difficulty in selecting the right cohesive devices within the right contexts. The first six highest ranked errors in the students’ essays were noted to be unclear pronoun references, wrong selection of cohesive devices, over usage of one cohesive device within the same textual environment, wider textual distances between references and their referents, omission of cohesive devices and wrong insertions of cohesive devices. Instances of references lacking referents recorded the least frequency in the data.

**Instances of Unclear Pronoun References in the Corpus**

Instances of unclear pronoun references to their referents featured as the second dominant cohesive error that distorted the connectivity in the essays of the students. Some instances of these cohesive errors are indicated in examples 1, 2 and 3.

1. *Firstly, suicide attempts can minimize when the tertiary institutions improve their counseling services for the students.* Many *educational institutions* on the tertiary level have *counselling units* where *students* are advised on some of the problems *they* face, but many things are amiss in the provision of *their* services. (FAs 1)

2. *When students face challenges at school, they should be sent to the counselling unit for the counsellors to give that student proper advice.* Again, *the parents of the student* should also be informed about any condition that *his or her child* is going through. *This* will make students regain their self-confidence and go about their academic activities instead of killing themselves. (HAS,13)

3. *In addition to the role guidance and counselling play in minimizing suicide attempt, parents and lecturers should motivate the students.* Most often, a lot of *students* attempt suicide because of the way their *parents* look at them as if *they* are useless. Some parents even call their children useless and a regret to the family. (FSS,3)

In example 1, the personal pronoun *they* lacks a specified referent. Thus, *they* can logically and semantically relate with the noun phrases *educational institutions, counselling units* and *students*. This creates confusion in the minds of readers as they may struggle to identify the specific referent of *they* and this situation breaks the textuality of the text. In that same extract, the use of the possessive determiner *their* confuses readers as to whether *their* refers to *educational institutions* or *counselling units*. The cohesive effect in example 1 would have been enhanced if the writer had specified the referent of the personal pronoun, *they* as well as the possessive determiner *their*. After a critical reading of example 1, one gets the conviction that the writer intended to link the personal pronoun *they* to the noun phrase *students*. Also, the correct and logical referent of the possessive determiner *their* is the noun phrase *counselling units*. Therefore, the texture of example 1 would have been realised if it had been captured as:

*Firstly, suicide attempts can minimize when the tertiary institutions improve their counseling services for the students. Many *educational institutions* on the tertiary level have *counselling units* where *students* are advised on some of the problems*
they (students) face, but many things are amiss in the provision of their (counselling units) services.

In this new state of example 1, there is no ambiguity as all the pronominals have their specified referents.

Example 2 shows another instance of unclear pronoun reference because the demonstrative pronoun *this* lacks a specified referent. Thus, *this* is preceded by two sentential units – (1) *they should be sent to the counselling unit for the counsellors to give that student proper advice* and (2) *the parents of the student should also be informed about any condition that his or her child is going through* – which can all serve as logical antecedent to *this*. Therefore, if the writer intended to relate *this* to the idea projected in the first sentential unit, then example 2 should have been captured as;

> When students face challenges at school, they should be sent to the counselling unit for the counsellors to give that student proper advice. Again, the parents of the student should also be informed about any condition that his or her child is going through. *This (students been sent to the counselling unit for counsellors to give them proper advice) will make students regain their self-confidence and go about their academic activities instead of killing themselves.*

Again, if the writer intended to relate *this* to the idea in the second sentential unit, then example 2 should have also been captured as;

> When students face challenges at school, they should be sent to the counselling unit for the counsellors to give that student proper advice. Again, the parents of the student should also be informed about any condition that his or her child is going through. *This (making a parent aware of any condition that his or her child is going through) will make students regain their self-confidence and go about their academic activities instead of killing themselves.*

Moreover, if the writer intended to refer to the ideas in the two sentences – (1) sending students to the counselling units for proper advice and (2) making parents aware of the challenges that their children might be going through – as the best ways to make students regain their self-confidence and go about their academic work instead of killing themselves, then the pronoun *this* should have been replaced with *these* as in;

> When students face challenges at school, they should be sent to the counselling unit for the counsellors to give that students proper advice. Again, the parents of the student should also be informed about any condition that his or her child is going through. *These will make students regain their self-confidence and go about their academic activities instead of killing themselves.*

Replacing *this* with *these* as demonstrated above, prevents ambiguity and enhances the texture of that extract.

Another instance of cohesive error can be found in example 3, where the personal pronoun *they* lacks a specified referent. Thus, in the last sentence of example 3, two noun phrases (NPs) – *students* and *parents* – precede the personal pronoun *they* and these two NPs can all serve as antecedent to *they*. This situation causes obscurity in the meaning of the last sentence of example 3. In other words, readers are confused in identifying the particular entity tagged as useless in that
proposition. Readers may therefore not know whether it is parents or students that are being described as useless. This obscurity in meaning caused by the ambiguous state of the personal pronoun they disconnects the unity in example 3, and as such makes example 3 incoherent.

Instances of Wrong Selection of Cohesive Devices
This cohesive error is the most dominant writing challenge identified in the corpus and it confirms Hajalzen’s (2017) work which identified this same cohesive challenge in the written English essays of undergraduate students at Alrebat University. The dominant nature of this cohesive error in the Ghanaian undergraduate students’ essays presupposes that the students lack knowledge in the type of cohesive devices to use at different contexts. Examples 4, 5 and 6 are typical instances of how this cohesive error featured in the corpus.

4. In conclusion, the University of Cape Coast should organize seminars, open their gates for the students in the various counselling units and parents should provide the necessary care for the students in the tertiary institution to help reduce the high rate of these cases in our educational institutions especially those on the tertiary level. (HAS, 20)

5. First and foremost, students must be given good parental care. As the saying goes, “charity begins at home”. Children normally pick up most behaviours from home. It is in this that moral values are determined. Children who receive good training from home will definitely act in that same manner wherever they find themselves. On the other hand, those who are given bad training at home also tend to behave in a way that depicts the kind of training they have been given. The second way of solving this issue is by enforcing laws to check them. (FAs, 14)

6. Minimizing suicide should not be the work of only the government, tertiary education heads, counsellors and parents alone. It is a work for all and sundry because we live with them in our society. We should bring everybody in the circle of love and provide for their emotional, financial, psychological and social needs. (FSS, 30)

In example 4, the reference relation created between the possessive determiner their and its antecedent the University of Cape Coast is erroneous. This erroneous reference relation stems from the fact that the University of Cape Coast semantically connotes a singular entity and as such, the right cohesive device that should have been selected to create a semantic tie with the University of Cape Coast is the possessive determiner its. Thus, the selection of their as a reference to the University of Cape Coast deviates the rule of concord. This is because, there is no agreement between the referent tertiary institution, which is in the singular state and its reference their, which connotes plurality. This situation distorts the connectivity that the student intends to create in the text.

Another instance of erroneous reference relation can be link to the bond established in example 5 between the pronoun them and its referent this issue. The reference relation created between this issue and them as in The second way of solving this issue is by enforcing laws to check them should have been captured as The second way of solving this issue is by enforcing laws to check it. Thus, the correct reference for the referent this issue should have been it instead of them. This is because
this issue semantically connotes a singular entity and as such, it is grammatically appropriate for any of its references to also reflect a singular state in order to achieve cohesive effect.

The semantic tie created between the referent suicide and its reference them in example 6, is another instance of wrong selection of cohesive device. Suicide, in example 6, is in a singular state and can only relate with a singular reference to achieve cohesive effect. Texture could have therefore been created if the writer had selected a singular grammatical item like it as the reference to suicide. Therefore, the sentence in example 6 should have read as;

*Minimizing suicide should not be the work of only the government, tertiary education heads, counsellors and parents alone. It is a work for all and sundry because we live with it in our society*

In this new form, it logically and grammatically relates with the referent suicide and as such, projects the connectivity in that text.

**Instances of Over Usage of One Cohesive Device within the Same Textual Environment**

Out of the seven types of cohesive errors that were identified in the essays, we observed that over usage of one cohesive device within the same textual environment featured as the sixth highest cohesive error in the data. This finding confirms earlier studies by El-Gazzar (2006) and Olateje (2006). The confirmation of this cohesive error in earlier studies establishes that over usage of one cohesive device within the same textual environment is a challenge of most ESL/EFL students. Therefore, there is an urgent need for it to be addressed by ESL/EFL instructors in order to improve ESL/EFL students’ academic writing. This cohesive error occurred as students over repeated the same cohesive device within the same sentential unit or a specific paragraph, a situation which makes reading of the essays boring. The students inability to vary their choice of cohesive devices to establish the same cohesive effect makes most of the paragraphs and sentences in their essays lose their semantic ties. See examples 7, 8, and 9 for some instances of this cohesive error in the data.

7. Although suicide has frequently been observed in most of our tertiary institutions but it seems the authorities in the country and various tertiary institutions are doing nothing about it but they brag to have been advertising against it. The government recently called for the establishment of various counseling units across the various tertiary institutions in Ghana but funds are not been made available for such acts but I am surprised the various tertiary institutions are silent on this but they rather face the consequences of suicide. Despite all these instances of suicide, there have not been any better solutions to it but both the universities and the government keep channeling revenues in other aspect of education but not in curbing suicide. (FA, 12)

8. Another way of minimizing suicide is to advise students to have self-confidence. When one has confidence in one’s self, it creates a source of pride. When one is determined in one’s life, no matter the afflictions and bad situations around them, one still have confidence in one’s self. When one knows what one needs or to achieve in life, one cannot be discouraged in one’s everyday life. This may help one to avoid ending one’s life by committing suicide. (FSS, 3)
9. First of all, suicide could not be minimized if the emotional problems of the youth are not tackled because the adolescent age is a transition stage where most emotional problems stem from. Also, at this stage the adolescent battles with self-esteem, choosing a career and also managing his life and others. This is also a critical stage where the affection for the opposite sex is strongly desired. Also, their whole sense of being could be crushed if they do not feel belonged. Therefore, guidance and counselling units in the tertiary institutions should be made available at students’ doorstep. Also, students with emotional problems should be given adequate attention. (HAS, 25)

The over repetition of cohesive devices as in the case of the adversative conjunction but in example 7, the indefinite pronoun one in example 8 and the additive conjunction also in example 9 makes reading of these texts boring. The students could have used other cohesive devices that might have established the same meaning and cohesive effect as the overly repeated ones. This would have rendered reading the essays more interesting and cohesively appropriate. In example 7 for instance, the writer could have varied the use of but to express adversative meaning with words like yet, though, however, nevertheless etc. whilst also, a grammatical word that is used to express addition in example 9, could have also been replaced in some instances with words like moreover, again, in addition, aside from this/these to express the same semantic meaning. Again, words like a person, someone, somebody etc. could have also been opted in some instances in example 8 to project the same cohesive effect as one.

Instances of Wider Textual Distances between References and their Referents

The fourth highest-ranked cohesive error identified in the essays is linked to the creation of wider textual distances between words that are anaphorically connected. This cohesive error reinforces the findings of earlier studies by El-Gazzar (2006), Adika (2010) and Mensah (2014). Examples 10, 11 and 12 are instances of wider textual distances between cohesive ties in a chain.

10. Last but not the least, suicide attempts can be on the low when parents of these students provide the necessary care for them in the tertiary institutions. The good book has established that parents should train their children the way they should, so they do not depart from it. Many suicide attempts happen because the negligence of the parents of these students in the tertiary student. Recently, a chemical engineering level 100 in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology committed suicide for trailing a course as first reported by the media. Further investigations helped the police establish that the attempt was not because the student trailed a course. It was reported that the student had written before she died that “Sorry mum and dad for not being the child you wanted me to be”. This asserts that if her parents had kept a close eye on her, she would not have committed that shameful act. In conclusion, tertiary institution should organize seminars, open their gates for the students in the various counseling units and parents should provide the necessary care for the students in the tertiary institutions to help reduce the high rate of these in our educational institutions especially those on the tertiary level. (FSS, 14)

11. Secondly, another major way of minimizing suicide attempts is by reducing the financial burden on poor families taking care of tertiary students. This can be done by introducing different scholarship schemes to cater for part or all tertiary expenses for the poor students. Also, it can be done by allowing part-payments of tertiary fees to allow poor
parents and guardians to gather enough resources and provide the fees of the wards. Since it is necessary for one to be financially stable or at least have little to have a sound mind to study, I encourage lot of loan schemes being introduced. To sum it up, the students should be relieved of any financial pressured that can lead to the occurrences of them. (HAS, 25)

12. To begin with, guidance and counselling is one of the ways through which suicide can be minimized. Most pupil in tertiary institutions face a lot of problems especially in relationship. When two pupil are in a relationship and there is a break up, one may commit suicide. For example, I had a female friend who was stressed up and did not know what to do because her boyfriend broke up with her and the boyfriend started dating the ladys friend and I took to a counsellor and after seeking counselling for a month, she became normal and happy – counselling services must be provided in various institutions so that pupil who might want to suicide not out of their own will but maybe by pressure from somewhere can seek counselling and avoid this in tertiary institutions. (FAs, 21)

In example 10, the demonstrative pronoun these in the last sentence semantically connects to suicide attempts, which is located in the first sentence. Thus, suicide attempts serves as a referent to the demonstrative pronoun these. However, the distance between these two linguistics units is so wide that readers may struggle to establish the connection between them. There are 196 words in-between these and suicide attempts. The reader may lose focus as far as the semantic tie between these two words is concerned. This significantly affects the texture of that text. The same cohesive challenge is evident in example 11, where the personal pronoun them has been widely separated from its referent suicide attempts. In example 12 too, there is a wider textual distance between the demonstrative reference this and its antecedent suicide. These instances of wider textual distances between references and their respective referents distort the flow of ideas in texts and as such, serve as “anti-texture” agents.

Instances of Omission of Cohesive Devices.
As the third highest cohesive error in the corpus, omission of cohesive devices featured 164(10.8%) times. This cohesive challenge makes readers find it difficult to establish connections between ideas in the essays. Omission of cohesive devices at places they were required in the essays distorts the logic in ideas projected in those essays. When cohesive devices are employed at places that they are required in texts, they make unrelated sentences become semantically bonded (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). See the exemplification of this cohesive error in examples 13, 14 and 15.

13. These measures include organizing training sections for students who are interested in guidance and counselling. After the training of these students, (...) would be assigned to the guidance and counselling personnel for the students to work under them. (FAs, 31)

14. Most at times, students stay away from health facilities after they have been diagnosed with these sicknesses especially after they are being told of their admission for a period of time. This is because, students fear that their
academic life will come to a standstill and they will not be able to catch up with their colleagues after (...) have fully recovered. (HAS,5)

15. Just recently, in one of the tertiary institutions, University of Ghana, Legon, to be precise, a lady who was one of the students was reported to have committed suicide. Another case of suicide was again reported in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, when a lady stabbed herself to death. There are pocket of other suicide attempts which are not stated. All these raises concern to not only the parents or to those who have committed the suicide but to the entire citizens of the country. It is therefore, in line with (...) that the essay seeks to establish at least three ways of minimizing the phenomenon. (FSS, 18)

In the third line of example 13, there is an omission of a cohesive device, and this omission is concomitant with the personal pronoun they. There is a need for the introduction of they to link the two linguistic units – After the training of the students and would be assigned to the guidance and counselling personnel for students to work under. The omission of this personal pronoun in that line breaks the free flow of information and the connectedness in that sentence. There would have been an unrestricted flow of information if example 13 has been captured as;

These measures include organizing training sections for students who are interested in guidance and counselling. After the training of these students, they would be assigned to the guidance and counselling personnel for the students to work under them.

The introduction of they reinstates the textuality of example 13. Thus, the introduction of they semantically relates with students and as such, establishes a bond between the subordinate clause After the training of these students and the main clause they would be assigned to the guidance and counselling personnel for the students to work under them. Another omission of cohesive device which has resulted in the breakdown of information flow is evident at the last line of example 14, where there is the need for the introduction of they after the verb phrase have fully recovered as;

Most at times, students stay away from health facilities after they have been diagnosed with these sicknesses especially after they are being told of their admission for a period of time. This is because students fear that their academic life will come to a standstill, and they will not be able to catch up with their colleagues after they have fully recovered.

Texture has been created by the introduction of the personal pronoun they, which serves as a coreferential to the noun students. Example 15 also gives an instance of an omission of the demonstrative reference these in the last sentence of example 15 and this breaks the semantic relation between that sentence and the other preceding sentences. This cohesive error could have been prevented if the writer had introduced the demonstrative pronoun these just after the preposition with as;
Just recently, in one of the tertiary institutions, University of Ghana, Legon, to be precise, a lady who was one of the students was reported to have committed suicide. Another case of suicide was again reported in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, when a lady stabbed herself to death. There are pocket of other suicide attempts which are not stated. All these raises concern to not only the parents or to those who have committed the suicide but to the entire citizens of the country. It is therefore, in line with these that the essay seeks to establish at least three ways of minimizing the phenomenon.

In this current state of example 15, these logically and semantically connects with the various instances of suicide cases that have been projected in the preceding sentences and this, to a very large extent, establishes texture in that extract. As far as this cohesive error is concerned, we propose that aside teaching ESL/EFL students cohesive devices, ESL/EFL instructors should also make proofreading and editing an integral part of students academic writing. Thus, if the students had taken these two post writing activities seriously, they would have corrected most instances of omission of cohesive devices in their essays.

Instances of Wrong Insertions of Cohesive Devices

Wrong insertions of cohesive devices is ranked as the sixth highest challenge that plagues the essays of the Ghanaian undergraduate students. Cohesive devices play a crucial role in ensuring connectedness in both spoken and written texts (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Kennedy, 2003). However, their insertions at places where they are not needed in a text distort the flow of information and render the text meaningless. The presence of this challenge in the essays is an indication that the first-year Ghanaian undergraduate students have weakness in identifying the right places in their essays where cohesive devices are needed for the creation of texture. This challenge makes these students haphazardly insert cohesive devices between sentential units and this in the long run, causes obscurity in the ideas that are developed in their essays. The students should be aware that for the creation of texture in texts, they have to demonstrate competence in selecting the right cohesive device within the right contexts. The opposite of that causes distortion in the flow of information. In examples 16, 17 and 18, there are instances of wrong insertions of cohesive devices, and these instances have blocked the flow of information.

16. For instance, in one of our classes one student who found out that he got two out of twenty in a quiz who now becomes depressed would like to engage in these activities to forget about the quiz he/she wrote for the time being. (HAS, 49)

17. Lastly, organization of fun games. Authorities in various tertiary institution must be able to organise fun game for student in other to realize some of their academic stress. They must be entertainment shows at least every week or every month in other to entertain student. These authorities must also organize fun games in various halls, department etc. (FSS 33)

18. Furthermore, counseling service should be given to the youth in the tertiary universities. The youth of nowadays get involved in a lot of emotional act and later get disappointed. They see suicide to be they only remedy to their problem. The media in Ghana were
buzzing about an incredible new recently about a young lady from the university of Ghana who committed suicide due to Emotional trauma. I believe if she had gotten a counselling to talk to her, she wouldn’t have gotten that far. (FA s 11)

In Extract 16, the referent one student is first specified as a masculine noun by the use of the pronoun he as its reference. However, in referring to the same referent for the second time, the writer uses he/she. The use of he/she presupposes that the referent one student which is confirmed as a masculine noun at the early stage of the discourse is now considered to be either a masculine or a feminine noun. This situation causes inconsistency in the flow of information in that and affects the texture of the that extract. That is, there is no need for the insertion of the pronoun she as part of the references of the noun phrase one student. Instead, the writer should have been consistent with the use of he and this would have created consistency in the idea expressed in that extract. In other words, the noun phrase one student cannot select both a masculine and a feminine pronoun as its references at the same time.

Apart from this, the use of they in the second line of example 17 is also erroneous. In other words, there was no need for the insertion of the cohesive device they within the context that it has been used in line 2 of example 17. The appropriate grammatical item that should have been used in place of they is there. The use of they in place of there affects the fluidity in the flow of information in that extract.

Instances of this cohesive challenge might probably occur as a result of the poor post writing culture of the students as they usually do not proofread their work after writing. Excellent proofreading by the student could have prevented an error like that. Lack of rigorous proofreading has accounted for another wrong insertion of the cohesive device they in the third sentence of example 18. The right word that the student should have used just after be in the third line of example 18 is the instead. Replacing the with they makes reading of the text difficult for readers as they may struggle to follow the line of argument projected in that extract.

Instances of References Lacking Referents

The last and least of the cohesive errors that are identified in the data is the students indiscriminate use of references that lack referents. This cohesive challenge represents just 2% of all instances of cohesive errors in the data. This finding, confirms that of Mensah (2014) and El-Gazzar (2006), whose studies identify uncertain references that lead to misinterpretation as a major writing challenge of ESL/EFL students in general. Reference, as a cohesive device, has the potential to create cohesive ties in texts by making endophoric (anaphoric and cataphoric) reference to a specific referent. However, in a situation where a reference is used without a referent within a text destroys the textuality of that text. That is, instances of this cohesive error create obscurity in meaning and also obstructs the smooth flow of information. Examples 19, 20 and 21 show instances of this cohesive challenge in the data.

19. Additionally, break ups in relationships is a major cause of suicidal cases in the country and on our university campuses. Some tertiary institutions like Legon, KNUST has recorded suicidal cases with the reason that, their boyfriends broke up with them. This is one major reason for suicidal attempts in tertiary institutions. (FAs, 50)

20. Suicide in a simple term is the act of intentionally taking a life. The cause of this unfortunate development may be as a result of mental disorder, broken heart or failure that has caught himself or herself in. According to the Ghana statistical board, about
30% of reported cases of suicide are recorded annually in Ghana. Out of this number about, 15% of the suicide are caused by the tertiary institutions in Ghana. (FSS, 26)

21. In my room, as I was watching a telenovela; Storm over paradise as I usually did on Friday nights. When the television show was over, I watched the evening news. As I was watching, I saw a friend in my former JHS picture in one of the funeral announcements they talked about. Curiously, I ask my parents what caused her death since they had always been watching evening news. (HAS, 47)

The employment of the pronouns their and them in example 19, himself and herself in example 20 and they in example 21 are all erroneous as they lack logical and specific referents. These instances of cohesive errors create confusion in the minds of readers as regards to the referents that these references relate with.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated “anti-texture” agents in the written English essays of ESL students from a Ghanaian university. Based on the empirical evidence projected in this study as well as the findings that came out of the analysis, we draw a conclusion that in their quest to use cohesive devices to create texture in their essays, ESL students from the Ghanaian context face seven main challenges: unclear pronoun references, wrong selection of cohesive devices, over usages of one cohesive device within the same textual environments, wider textual distances between references and their referents, omission of cohesive devices, wrong insertions of cohesive devices and references lacking referents. The findings further brought to the fore that wrong selection of cohesive devices, and unclear pronoun references to their referents are the two dominant cohesive challenges in the essays that were analysed. The findings of this study have significant pedagogical implications as they serve as a valuable asset to ESL curriculum developers, ESL tutors and students in general.

In light of these findings, we seek to propose three main recommendations to improve language education and writing proficiency, particularly concerning the effective and appropriate use of cohesive devices as texture creation agents. First, ESL language instructors should make it a point to increase ESL students’ exposure to cohesive devices as texture creation agents. Also, English as a Second Language course outlines should give space for the teaching of the types and subtypes of cohesive devices as well as their appropriate usages within the right contexts. ESL language instructors should further create the awareness to students that the deployment of cohesive devices in text is not a yardstick for creating text quality. However, cohesive devices can contribute to text quality when writers appropriately select these agents of texture, vary the choice of these devices to achieve the same cohesive effects and avoid the over usage of one cohesive device within the same textual environment, be it at the sentence level or paragraph level.

REFERENCES


