

Examining Logical Connectives and Person Markers in P4 Learners' Biographies

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Abstract - Biographical writings form a primary genre in language teaching and provide students with opportunities to reflect on their experiences while enhancing their writing abilities. This research examines how P4 (fourth-grade) ESL learners use coherence and cohesiveness in narrative creation in biographical writing. The study analyses endophoric references, logical connectives, person indicators, and sequencing tactics in 13 student-written biographies using mixed approaches. Qualitative interpretation illuminates how language characteristics shape literary cohesiveness and personal expression, while quantitative analysis shows their frequent patterns. Findings show that young ESL learners use discourse markers inconsistently, overusing personal pronouns and limited logical connectors. Data in graphs and tables show these trends and suggest instructional interventions. The study suggests instructional guidelines to improve narrative coherence in early-stage second-language acquisition, contributing to ESL writing growth. These findings impact multilingual educational curricula and instruction.

Keywords: ESL Writing, Biographical Narratives, Linguistic Cohesion, Second-Language Acquisition, PYP Learners

1. Introduction

Autobiographical writing is a fundamental genre in language education, providing learners with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences while honing their writing skills (Hyland, 2004). For English as a Second Language (ESL) students, this genre presents both challenges and opportunities, as it requires the effective use of linguistic devices to construct coherent and meaningful narratives. Writing in a second language demands mastery of cohesion, coherence, and discourse markers that help organize content effectively.

Halliday and Hasan's seminal work, *Cohesion in English* (1976), laid the groundwork for analysing textual cohesion, introducing concepts such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Their framework has been instrumental in subsequent studies examining ESL writing.

Connor (1984) compared cohesion and coherence in ESL learners' essays to those of native English speakers, finding that while general cohesion density did not differ significantly, ESL writers lacked variety in lexical cohesive devices and often failed to provide adequate justification for claims, impacting overall coherence.

Schleppegrell (1996) analysed the use of "because" clauses, revealing that ESL writers used them more frequently than native speakers, often for local cohesion rather than creating cohesive links with prior discourse, suggesting a developmental stage in ESL writing proficiency.

The development of writing skills among young English as a Second Language (ESL) learners has been a focal point of linguistic research for several decades. Central to this inquiry are the concepts of cohesion and coherence, which are essential for constructing meaningful and fluent narratives.

The application of discourse analysis in ESL classrooms has provided deeper insights into students' writing patterns. Rigganbach (1999) emphasized that discourse analysis activities can enhance students' awareness of genre-specific features and improve their writing versatility.

By engaging in discourse analysis, students become more attuned to the organizational structures and linguistic features characteristic of various genres, thereby improving their writing skills.

Paltridge (2001) further advocated for integrating discourse analysis into ESL instruction, suggesting that it equips students with the tools to critically analyze texts and understand the sociocultural contexts influencing language use. This approach fosters a more nuanced understanding of language, enabling students to produce more coherent and contextually appropriate texts.

Research has consistently shown a strong correlation between the use of cohesive devices and the overall quality of narrative writing among ESL learners. Flores and Yin (2015) found that higher-scoring narratives exhibited a greater proportion of topical progression compared to lower-scoring ones, indicating that effective use of cohesive ties contributes to writing quality.

Similarly, Bae (2001) investigated the nature of cohesion and coherence in children's essays, revealing that effective use of cohesive devices is linked to higher writing quality.

Despite the recognized importance of cohesion and coherence, ESL learners often face challenges in employing these elements effectively. A study analysing the narrative writings of students in SMAN 4 Praya identified that while students could use certain cohesive devices, their application was often inconsistent, leading to coherence issues. (Marjohan, 2017). These findings suggest that while ESL learners may be familiar with cohesive devices, they may not always use them effectively to enhance textual coherence.

The insights from these studies have significant implications for ESL pedagogy. Emphasizing the teaching of cohesive devices and their appropriate use can enhance students' writing coherence. Moreover, integrating discourse analysis into the curriculum can develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling them to understand and apply linguistic features effectively in their writing. Fernández Martínez (2011) pointed out that discourse analysis offers tangible ways of interpreting contemporary culture, making students aware of the complexities of language use.

While ESL learners often face challenges in employing cohesive devices effectively, targeted instructional strategies that incorporate discourse analysis can significantly improve their narrative writing skills. Future research should continue to explore innovative pedagogical approaches to support ESL learners in mastering these essential aspects of writing.

3. Significance of Study

Further investigation is required to understand the pedagogical implications of these linguistic features for ESL classroom practices (Leki, 1992; Connor, 1996). The influence of logical connectives and sequencing on coherence in biographical writing by young learners remains insufficiently studied. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing linguistic patterns in student-authored autobiographies, providing insights into narrative structuring and recommendations for improving writing instruction in ESL classrooms.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative discourse analysis approach to examine autobiographical writing among P4 ESL learners. Biographical writing samples were collected from 13 P4 ESL students. Texts were transcribed and coded for discourse features.

The dataset consists of 13 student-authored biographies, analysed for linguistic markers such as endophoric references, logical connectives, person markers, and sequencing strategies.

The analysis follows a three-step process, utilizing NVivo software for coding and data organization:

- **Coding linguistic markers** – The texts are coded for cohesive and coherence-building features (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) using NVivo software to ensure systematic categorization.
- **Frequency analysis** – The occurrence of specific linguistic devices is quantified to identify trends and patterns.
- **Thematic categorization** – A qualitative content analysis is conducted to examine patterns and inconsistencies in the learners' use of these features.

The study is based on Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes peer interaction and teacher guidance in language development. The integration of NVivo software enhances data reliability and allows for in-depth analysis of textual patterns. The findings aim to inform pedagogical strategies for enhancing ESL narrative writing.

4.1. Objectives

The objective of this research is to analyse the use of endophoric references, logical connectives, person markers, and sequencing strategies in P4 ESL learners' autobiographical texts. The study identifies patterns and inconsistencies in the learners' application of these linguistic devices. Further, it also explores pedagogical implications for improving narrative writing instruction in ESL classrooms.

5. Data Analysis

The analysis of autobiographical texts written by P4 ESL learners revealed distinct patterns in their use of linguistic features, shedding light on both strengths and areas requiring further instructional support. The examination focused on four key discourse elements: logical connectives, person markers, sequencing devices, and endophoric references. A mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative discourse examination, was employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of these patterns.

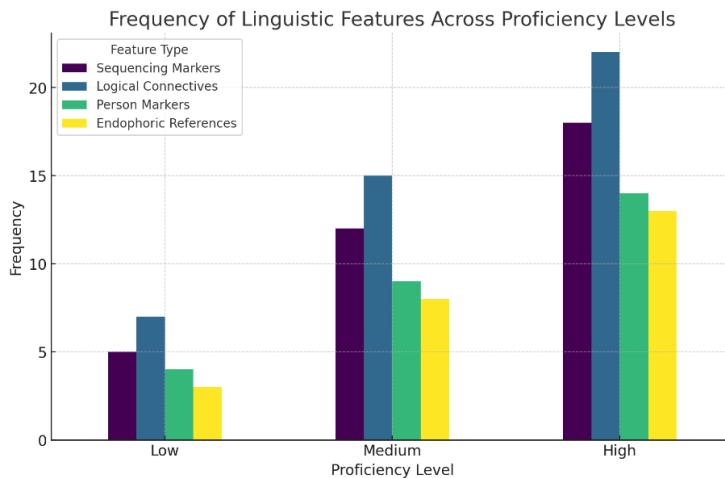
5.1. Quantitative Analysis of Linguistic Features

A frequency analysis of linguistic markers within the collected texts indicated an uneven distribution across categories. Table 1 presents the occurrence of each discourse feature, highlighting the degree to which learners incorporated these elements into their writing.

Table 1: Frequency Analysis of Linguistic Features

Feature	Frequency (%)	Common Examples
Logical Connectives	15%	and, but, then, so
Person Markers	61%	I, my, we, she, he
Sequencing Devices	23%	first, next, then
Endophoric Markers	15%	this, that, these

Graph 1: Frequency Analysis of Linguistic Features Across Proficiency Level



Graph 2: Distribution of Metadiscourse Markers

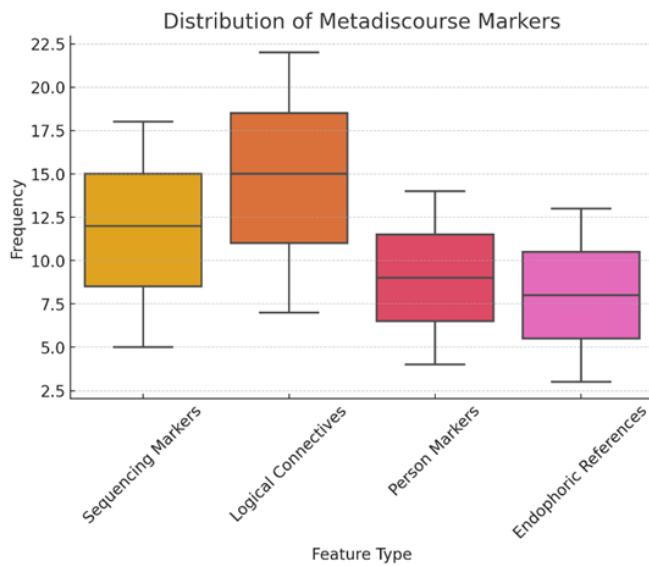
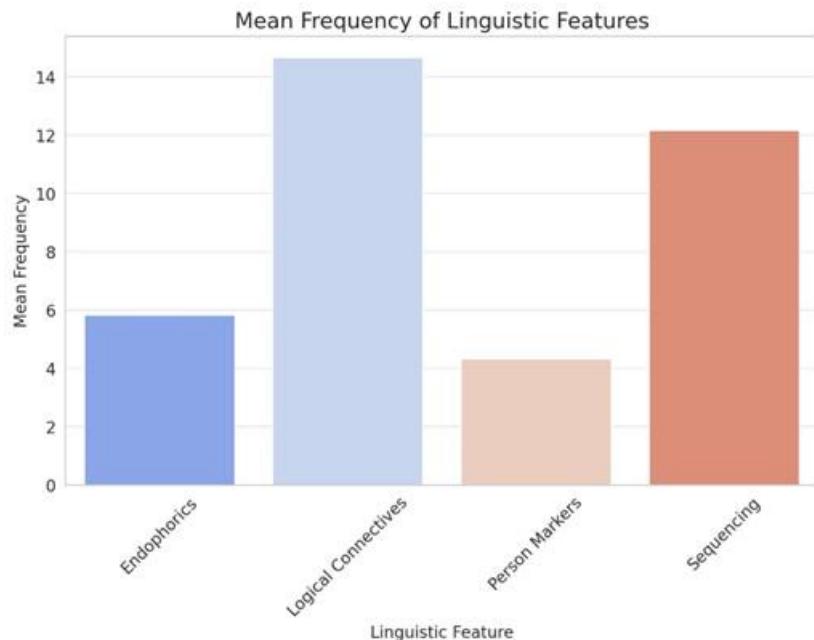


Table 1: Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Linguistic Features

Feature	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Median	Mode	Confidence Interval Lower	Confidence Interval Upper
Endophorics	5.83	3.92	15.37	5.5	5	3.34	8.32
Logical Connectives	14.67	7.51	56.33	14.0	15	9.90	19.44
Person Markers	4.33	2.42	5.85	4.0	4	2.79	5.87
Sequencing	12.17	6.51	42.33	12.0	12	8.03	16.31

Graph 1: Mean Frequency of Linguistic Features



The data indicate that learners relied predominantly on personal pronouns (61%), demonstrating a preference for direct reference in their narratives. In contrast, logical connectives and sequencing devices were used inconsistently (15% and 23%, respectively), pointing to challenges in establishing coherence within the text. Endophoric markers, essential for referential cohesion, were the least frequently used (15%), suggesting a need for targeted interventions to enhance textual connectivity.

5.2. Qualitative Analysis of Narrative Complexity

Beyond numerical trends, a qualitative examination of student texts provided insights into the functional role of linguistic features in shaping narrative coherence. Several key observations emerged:

- Limited Use of Logical Connectives:** While students employed basic conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, the presence of subordinating connectives (e.g., *because*, *although*) was minimal. This indicates a tendency toward simple sentence structures rather than complex, multi-clausal constructions that enhance logical flow.
- Heavy Dependence on Person Markers:** The dominance of personal pronouns, particularly first-person references (*I*, *my*), highlights a strong self-referential approach. However, minimal variation in the use of third-person pronouns suggests a limited exploration of narrative perspectives, which could impact the depth of autobiographical reflection.
- Inconsistent Sequencing Strategies:** While some learners successfully utilized temporal markers such as *first*, *next*, and *then*, others exhibited a fragmented narrative flow, with abrupt transitions between events. This inconsistency underscores the need for explicit instruction on chronological structuring within storytelling.
- Minimal Endophoric Referencing:** The underuse of demonstrative pronouns (*this*, *that*, *these*) suggests a reliance on direct repetition rather than cohesive referencing strategies. As a result, some texts displayed redundancy and lacked textual economy, making it challenging for readers to follow ideas fluidly.

6. Discussion

The analysis of the P4 ESL learners' biographical writings indicates important trends in their use of linguistic cohesive devices, especially logical connectives and person markers. These findings provide important information about developmental milestones in the writing of young ESL writers and suggest areas where help may be beneficial.

The quantifiable data show clearly that the person markers are vastly preferred (61%) over other cohesive devices. This predominance conforms to the developmental patterns seen in young writers, as the use of personal pronouns presents a relatively easy access to narrative construction. The frequent use of the first-person pronouns I, my, and we reflects the autobiographical nature of the texts but also suggests limited possibilities for the consideration of other perspectives. According to Bae (2001), young ESL writers fail to render target language referential strategies in a variety of ways. This in turn creates possibilities for redundancy in the narrative structure of their text.

The stark overuse of person markers can be explained in Vygotskian (1978) terms as indicative of a learner in the process of internalizing the more advanced grammatical structures. Such heavy person usage speaks of P4 learners being within their actual zone of proximal development, engaging the person markers as familiar linguistic tools while gradually building up to more advanced cohesive strategies.

Notable is the use of relatively low figures for logical connectives (15%). The data show that students incorporated simple connectives like "and," "but," and "then," but there was very limited use of advanced connectives that signal causation (because, therefore), contrast (however, although), or elaboration (moreover, furthermore). This finding is in keeping with Schleppegrell (1996), who found that ESL writers were more likely to use simple connectives for local cohesion than to engage in the more complex cohesive linking of ideas across discourse.

The qualitative analysis also revealed that when instances of logical connectives did occur, repetition was not seldom, nor was the semantic context always correct. For example, "and" an additive connective occurred frequently when the intent could have been better expressed with a causal or contrastive connective. This observation conforms to Connor's (1984) claim that ESL students generally do not use a variety of cohesive devices, which would affect the overall coherence of their writing.

The findings bear multiple implications for PYP ESL writing instruction. First, even if a study on person markers is seen as a natural beginning for teaching young writers, educators would want to encourage students toward using a wider variety of referential strategies that retain cohesion while avoiding repetition. Instruction may foreground anaphoric, cataphoric, demonstrative, and lexical substitutive methods.

In the tradition of Rigganbach (1999) and Paltridge (2001), awareness of genre-specific features can be built through discourse analysis activities. Teachers may design text analysis activities that engage students in identifying and categorizing logical connectives in model texts, then guide the students to incorporate these devices into their writing with directed practice.

These findings contribute to the broader discourse on ESL writing development by reaffirming the importance of cohesive devices in second-language writing. Furthermore, they offer a foundation for future research exploring the impact of targeted instructional interventions on students' ability to craft coherent and cohesive narratives. Future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach to track metadiscourse development over time or investigate cross-linguistic influences on cohesive device usage in ESL learners (Odlin, 1989).

7. Conclusion

The research analysed logical connectors and person markers in the biographical writing of P4 ESL learners to capture their developmental stage in the usage of cohesive devices. The results show a heavy reliance on person

markers at 61% and a limited deployment of logical connectives at 15%, comprising mostly simple additive and sequential markers. While the heavy use of first-person pronouns is appropriate for biographical writing, the limited diversity in references suggests that there is still room for improvement. The positive correlation between number of logical connectives in a paper and proficiency in writing is an indication of the importance of having such devices for coherent story writing, as found in the current study. The contribution of such findings to ESL writing includes highlighting certain linguistic features characterizing the developing proficiency of young learners to provide an evidence base for pedagogical intervention. When such logical connectives are taught directly within story structures, it helps such P4 ESL learners move beyond simple text connections. Future research should tackle longitudinal studies tracking developmental trajectories and cross-linguistic perspectives studying how the first language may influence acquisition of cohesive devices.

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