

## The use and misuse of additive, adversative and causal conjunctions in first-year students' academic arguments at two state universities in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

*The study investigated first-year undergraduate students' use, misuse, and non-use of additive, adversative and causal conjunctions in academic writing at two state universities in Zimbabwe. The inquiry was informed by Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy of cohesive devices. The qualitative study adopted a case study design. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with seven purposively sampled Communication Skills lecturers, as well as document analysis of 100 conveniently sampled written essays, fifty essays from each of the two universities. Data were analysed using the thematic approach. The study established that students made use of the three selected conjunctives with varying degrees of frequency, with some of the students employing the cohesive devices accurately. However, the study also found out that some students faced challenges in their use of additives, adversatives and causatives, such as confusing the three, overusing some, and failure to make use of the conjunctives, thereby impacting negatively on the smooth flow of ideas in the students' arguments. The study recommends increased focus on the teaching of the use of conjunctives not just in the Communication Skills module but through an integrated approach across the university curriculum. The study also recommends that students adopt the process approach to academic writing that would ensure that their academic pieces are thoroughly edited for, among other aspects, cohesive devices.*

**Keywords:** *Academic writing; Cohesion; Coherence; Conjunctions; Communication*

### Introduction and background

The study focuses on the use, misuse and non-use of additive, adversative and causal conjunctions by first-year students in academic writing at two selected state universities in Zimbabwe. This is against the backdrop of cohesion being touted as one of the most significant aspects of academic writing (McNamara, Crossley & McCarthy, 2010). In support, Hinkel (2001:112) observes that "composition and writing instruction continues to focus on the uses and meanings of cohesive devices."

Nunan (2003:88) defines writing as "the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organising them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to the reader." Thus, academic writing is an integral aspect of a university student's academic life. As Bailey (2006) aptly observes, most academic courses assess students through the written form, which includes coursework and examinations. Similarly, Gonye et al. (2012:72) aver

that “Effective academic writing is crucial to every university student since much of the assessment that goes on at university is based, not only on what information students present but also on how that information is presented, in writing.” This observation points to the significance of cohesive devices, the use of which seems to be presenting challenges to the first-year university students under study.

Numerous characteristics define a good academic piece of writing. However, the focus of the present study is on only one aspect of academic writing, that is, cohesion, particularly the use of conjunctions and specifically, additive, adversative, and causal conjunctions.

### **Theoretical framework and literature review**

The study is guided by Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) taxonomy of cohesive devices in which they developed a model which is currently viewed as “*the model* for any linguistic analysis that goes beyond the sentence level” (Abu-Ayyash & McKenny, 2017:95) (emphasis ours). In their enduring “seminal tool of discourse and text analysis” (Abu-Ayyash & McKenny, 2017:95), Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorise cohesive devices into referencing, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesive devices. While the first four are referred to as grammatical cohesive devices, the fifth one is non-grammatical. In their own words, there is;

cohesion through reference, cohesion through substitution, cohesion through ellipsis, cohesion through conjunction, and cohesion through lexical items. Of these various types of cohesive relations, the first four are grammatical, while the other is lexical (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:4).

The present study is interested in conjunction. This is proof that the original Halliday and Hasan model has “never gone out of date” (Abu-Ayyash & McKenny, 2017:97). The reputation and influence of the chosen model by Halliday and Hasan is evidenced by a litany of related studies on cohesion (Bahaziq, 2016; Mang’oka, Ogola and Bartoo, 2019; Hinkel, 2001; Abu-Ayyash & McKenny, 2017; Hananta & Sukyadi, 2015; Crossley, Yang & McNamara, 2014).

Cohesion refers to joining a text together by means of reference words and conjunctions, to make the whole text clear and readable (Bailey, 2006). Bahaziq (2016:112), citing Halliday and Hasan (1976) affirms that “Cohesion occurs when the interpretation of one item depends on the other, i.e. one item presupposes the other.” To Crossley, Kyle and McNamara (2016),

cohesion refers to the presence or absence of linguistic cues in a text, which allows the reader to make connections between ideas in the text. Cohesive devices provide evidence of text comprehensibility, hence the more the text cohesion, the greater the comprehensibility of a text (Crossley, Yang and McNamara, 2014). Cohesive devices make a text hang together. They are “the ‘glue’ of a text, holding the text together as a discourse rather than as an accidental sequence of sentences” (Biber, Connor and Upton, 2007:5). As Abu-Ayyash and McKenny (2017:96) put it, it is “through cohesive devices, [that] writers establish the logical organization and structure of information in all kinds of texts.”

The current study focuses on conjunctions, defined as a specification of how what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). “Unlike the other grammatical devices, conjunctions express the ‘logical-semantic’ relation between sentences rather than between words and structures. They structure the text in a certain logical order that is meaningful to the reader or listener” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976 quoted in Bahazip, 2016: 114). Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorise conjunctions into additive, adversative, causal, and temporal conjunctions. Additive conjunctions are used to add more information and they include ‘Moreover’, ‘Furthermore’, and ‘In addition.’ Adversative conjunctions are used to contrast information. Examples are ‘However’, ‘yet’, ‘but’, and ‘On the other hand.’ Causal conjunctions show cause and they include ‘As a result’, ‘Thus’, ‘Hence’, and ‘Consequently.’ The last category, temporal conjunctions, show relation in terms of time and they include ‘Then’, ‘Subsequently’, and ‘After that.’

McGinely (1991) uses the term ‘connectives’ to refer to conjunctions and, in line with Halliday and Hasan’s categorisation above, states that connectives are of four types. The first type refers to those which show continuity (additive). The second group comprises those that signal change of direction (adversative). The third category involves those signalling cause/effect (causal), and the fourth group signals conclusion. Bailey (2006) defines conjunctions as words and phrases which join parts of a sentence together or which link a sentence to the next one.

The present study is not concerned with all the conjunctions as explored above, but concerns itself with additive, adversative and causal conjunctions, with particular focus on how university students move from one paragraph to another to strengthen an argument, how they switch from one side of the argument to the other, and how they terminate paragraphs in written arguments. This is in a context where McNamara, Crossley and McCarthy (2010:61)

observe that “Although the importance of cohesion in writing is widely assumed, there is scant evidence to support this notion. Empirical evidence either supporting or rejecting this notion appears to be available solely for second language (L2) writers.”

Many studies have been carried out on students’ use of cohesive devices or aspects of cohesion. Hananta and Sukyadi (2015) carried out a study on the use of cohesion in students’ argumentative writings at a university in Indonesia. The study established that reiteration (an aspect of lexical cohesion) was the most frequently used cohesive device, followed by reference, conjunction, substitution, and ellipsis. In terms of conjunction, which the current study was interested in, Hananta and Sukyadi found out that additive conjunction was the most dominantly used, followed by temporal, causal, and adversative devices.

Hamed (2014) also investigated the use of conjunctions in argumentative essays written by English as a Foreign Language students at a university in Libya and established that, generally, the students employed additive, adversative and causal conjunctions inappropriately. In that study, adversative conjunctions were found to pose the most difficulties, especially use of ‘on the other hand’, followed by additive conjunctions, especially ‘moreover’, and then causal conjunctions, especially ‘so’.

Kadiri, Igbokwe, Okebalama and Egbe (2016) studied the use of lexical cohesion by students at a university in Nigeria. The study unearthed that students tended to make use of reiteration (repetition) at the expense of synonyms and lexical sets, that is, the students under-utilised or completely omitted some lexical cohesion elements. The study also established that each written text by the students showed some elements of cohesion, but a few texts had strong cohesion while the majority showed weak cohesion.

In Ghana, Mensah (2014) investigated the use of cohesion in the essays of final year senior high school students at an academy in Accra. The study established that students used lexical reference and conjunctive ties, in that order of frequency, while ellipsis and substitution were not used. In terms of conjunctions, the study found out that the students tended to depend largely on one type of additive conjunction, ‘also’, and tended to use causal conjunctions where additive ones should have been used.

Mang’oka, Ogola and Bartoo (2019) undertook a unique study in Kenya to describe and classify the lexical cohesive devices the hearing-impaired secondary school learners used to achieve cohesion in their essays. They established that learners were generally limited in their use of other cohesive devices such as reference and conjunction. One significant conclusion

from their findings was that: “The hearing-impaired learners carelessly repeated similar words immediately after another, forming strings of words that didn’t make sense” (Mang’oka, Ogola & Bartoo, 2019:32). The idea of repetition or overuse of certain devices was also mentioned in Johnson’s (2017) study with students in Peru. Johnson found out that students overused ‘First’, ‘Second’ and ‘In conclusion’, which led him to conclude that: “Despite the students’ best efforts, the writing was not cohesive. Students seemed to be saying nothing, but they were saying nothing very well” (Johnson, 2017:1). Following his findings, Johnson recommends that teachers analyse authentic texts with students and promote production of vocabulary, among others, to enhance mastery of cohesive writing. Most of the cited studies, however, tended to focus on wide-ranging cohesive devices whereas this current paper focuses on conjunction only.

### **Statement of the problem**

One of the central aspects of academic writing is the ability to correctly use cohesive devices to make the texts hang together. However, researches by scholars such as Kadiri, Igbokwe, Okebalama and Egbe (2016) and Hamed (2014) show that students face problems with the correct use of cohesive devices. This affects the flow of their arguments in academic essays. Additive, causal and adversative conjunctions are among the most useful devices that facilitate the flow of arguments in academic essays. Hence, the current study set out to investigate the use or misuse of these devices by students.

### **Objectives**

#### **The study sought to:**

1. establish the extent to which beginner students at the two selected universities use additive, causal and adversative conjunctions in academic essays.
2. examine how the students use additive, causal and adversative conjunctions.
3. proffer suggestions on how students may enhance effective use of additive, causal and adversative conjunctions and improve cohesion in academic essays.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the qualitative research approach. This approach comprises several diverse endeavors, many of which are concerned with the impartial study of realities which are in some sense objective (Silverman, 2013). Its major aims are to develop detailed stories to describe a phenomenon and achieve a deeper understanding of issues (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016). Creswell (2007:37) notes that “qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study.” Hence, the

aspect of use and misuse of cohesive devices in academic writing by first-year students at the two selected universities was objectively studied so that a detailed analysis of the phenomenon could be made.

### **Research Design**

The case study research design was deemed the most appropriate for this study. According to Trochim et al. (2016), a case study is an intensive study of a specific individual, event, organisation or specific context. Creswell (2007:73) observes that "...case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context). Therefore, the issue of how level one students use and/or misuse cohesive devices at the two state universities was explored in detail. Kumar (2011) notes that it is a very useful design when exploring an area where little is known or where you want to have a holistic understanding of the situation, phenomenon, episode, site, group or community. In this research, the researchers wanted to have a complete understanding of how level one of students used or misused cohesive devices in academic essays.

### **Sample**

Purposive sampling was used to select the lecturer sample. According to Trochim et al. (2016:87), "In purposive sampling, you sample with a purpose related to the kind of participant you're looking for." Thus, the seven lecturers who make up the total of the Communication Skills course lecturers at the two universities were chosen on the basis that they could provide meaningful insights on the phenomenon under study. In addition, fifty academic assignments written by first-year students from each of the two universities were conveniently sampled for analysis. Convenience sampling was used because the researchers were directly in contact with the first year students, hence, their assignments were easily accessible for analysis.

### **Data generation methods**

Document analysis and semi-structured interviews were the key data generation tools. Creswell (2007:38) observes that, "Qualitative researchers ...gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source." The use of these two methods enabled the researchers to get meaningful insights on the use of cohesive devices by first-year students at the two universities.

The researchers analysed assignments written by the selected level one students from the two state universities to establish the most frequently used, accurately used and wrongly used cohesive devices when moving from one paragraph to another and when concluding

paragraphs. In addition to that, the researchers also looked at the use of non-existent words as well as the non-use of cohesive devices by students in their written assignments.

The interview was chosen because it enabled the researchers to establish rapport with the people being interviewed (McBurney & White, 2010), which then enabled the researchers to get significant insights from the Communication Skills lecturers on how their students used or misused cohesive devices in academic essay writing.

### **Findings**

#### **Findings from document analysis**

Findings from students' assignments indicate that as far as cohesive devices are concerned, we have one group of learners who make accurate use of additive, adversative and causative cohesive devices, a second group who misuse them and a third group who do not refer to these devices at all.

#### **Correct use of additives**

The additives used in most students' academic essays include the following: 'also'; 'moreover'; 'in addition' and 'furthermore'. Some able students used additives in supporting ideas in sentences that come soon after an illustration. Such sentences normally come towards the end of a paragraph. For example, in a paragraph which had explained and demonstrated that oral communication embodies two-way communication, a student had the following as an example of a sentence that contained a correctly used additive device 'also': *In his book, Fielding (2010) also noted that the interview is an example of two-way communication.* The sentence that came soon after this additive explained how an interview is a two-way communication exchange between an interviewer and an interviewee. Thereafter, the student neatly concluded that paragraph.

A similar correctly used additive cohesive device towards the end of a paragraph was picked from another student's essay. The student was exploring the value of drawing from Shannon and Weaver's theory of redundancy/repetition to guarantee accessibility of messages to recipients during communication. After clarifying her point the student went on to write: *Moreover, the theory has shed new light into the idea of having the seven o'clock, eight o'clock and nine o'clock news bulletins repeating the same news items read during the earlier six o'clock bulletin before them.*

Yet another correct use of the additive demonstrated by students was to place the device at the beginning of a new paragraph. This was done mostly when the student had, in the

previous paragraph, discussed something similar or related and was then about to bring in a new point. Among the few correctly used examples were the structure: *Furthermore, there is the issue of timing one's speech or communication.* This excerpt was taken from an assignment that was discussing the roles of the sender in ensuring effective communication. A related example of beginning a cumulative paragraph, extracted from a different essay, read thus: *Also considered in this essay is the significance of the sender's encoding skills.*

### **Wrong use and overuse of additives**

Of greater worry was evidence which showed that, ordinarily, many students struggled to make their paragraphs coherent, especially in moving from one paragraph into another smoothly. Even within a paragraph, some weak students failed to pick the right additive and place it in the right place, thus compromising meaning and coherence. One clear example of such misuse occurred in the forced placement of the additive device 'moreover' as shown in the following example. *Respecting the views of the receiver is moreover a good habit in communication.* The sentence came towards the end of a paragraph that was purporting to develop the idea of the importance of the element 'receiver' in a communication transaction. The presence of 'moreover' in the sentence is unwarranted and its purpose distorted. Otherwise, the device that could have been more appropriate would have been the adversative 'however'.

A big problem that students faced in using additives was to string interchangeable cohesive devices in the same sentence, which created a tautological effect. This weakness is exemplified in one of the sentences taken from a student's essay, which goes; *Furthermore to this, in his argument he adds again the issue of timeous feedback.* More sentences of a similar nature were found as topic sentences of new paragraphs of several students' essays. In the example above, the phrases 'to this' and 'adds again' bring redundancy to the sentence. Similarly, the following excerpt from another essay shows how students sometimes repeat themselves: *In addition, another point the writer adds is that language is sexist in nature.* The clause 'another point the writer adds' is unnecessary shortly after 'In addition'. Such errors were committed by students who were conscious of the necessity to use additives but whose handling of the devices was, however, poor.

Some of the students' essays also showed clumsiness where cohesive devices were used wrongly in consecutive paragraphs, thereby breaking coherence. A case in point is where a student's new paragraph read *In addition, there is also the context of the communication*

*transaction*’ where the preceding paragraph had begun “Furthermore”. Logic indicates that ‘furthermore’ builds upon some previous additions and should therefore not precede ‘In addition.’”

A paragraph in one essay showed an example of misuse of the additive device ‘besides’ in a topic sentence which read: *Besides, the pertinent aspects of the model include its overvaluing of the sender and his communicative effects.* This could have been an effective device had it been used after the student had listed a few items. In this case, however, the additive was not effective since it was wrongly used, coming prematurely before the student had identified any other aspects of the model in the essay.

Examples of the wrong usage of additives also included beginning a paragraph with ‘*For instance...*’ without prior introduction of the subject or main idea of the paragraph; and, ‘*Also, it has many advantages*’, without first referring to what ‘it’ is. This kind of error also came as a thoughtless continuation of an unfinished idea carried from the previous paragraph, thus creating disjuncture. However, there was a sizeable number of students who avoided using additives at all. Of the 100 essays analysed, twenty-one were found not to have used additives at all. While there were a scattering of causatives and the adversative ‘however’, their essays seemed to avoid additives. Most of the paragraphs had very short, sometimes mundane, sentences such as: *The receiver is a very important element. He or she decodes the message. The interpretation is done by the receiver always.*

### **Correct use of adversatives**

The following list includes the adversatives that were properly used, overused and those that were incorrectly used: ‘but’, ‘however’, ‘even though’, ‘yet’, ‘on the other hand’ and ‘nevertheless’. The results show that a few exceptionally good students were able to use ‘but’ correctly, as an adversative. ‘But’ was used correctly as either part of a localised discussion within a paragraph or as marking departure from a previously and generally upheld view as argued in the paragraphs that preceded it. The first example can be illustrated best in this sentence extracted from one student’s essay: *But more needs to be brought forward to support the view that the sender can determine the effects of communication* while the second is found in another sentence taken from a different student’s essay: *But to say that the effectiveness of communication solely rests with the sender is an overstatement.* In the first example above, the debate was a continuous one where the student had argued that the sender is quite crucial if the communication that he/she makes has to have a desired impact on the audience. Following the acknowledgment and illustration to that effect, the student then

turned in the same paragraph to suggest the need to bring up more proof. In the second example, though, the 'but' structure was used to show a possible complete departure from the held view. This device was used midway through the essay to introduce a contrary view that invited the reader to reconsider his/her view about the centrality of the sender in a process where we also have an equally important receiver.

The adversative cited below was found in yet another student's essay: *Even though the above point is significant, there are some who think otherwise*. The sentence was a topic sentence of a paragraph that intended to counter an argument that the student had raised in the previous paragraph. In this case, the student used the adversative correctly. Similarly, most of the adversative cohesive devices identified from the essays were mainly those to do with indicating the discursive turn in the essay. This is where the writers introduce views contrary to those covered in the first half of the essay. The following two structures drawn from students' essays are some of the common structures that show that adversative departure:

*However, there are other views which support one-way communication.*

*Yet, it cannot be doubted that the receiver's input seals the effectiveness of communication.*

The preceding examples show that there are some students who are good at utilising adversatives to indicate direction of their arguments as well as tie up those arguments.

### **Wrong use or overuse of adversatives**

Many students' essays demonstrated that recurrent problems with adversatives were issues related to clumsy structures. The essays analysed showed that, oftentimes, many a student's attempt to use an adversative left the point unclear and the reader confused. Examples of such confusing structures include the two following sentences extracted from the essays:

*Yet the point is clear but the reasoning is not.*

*Nevertheless both scholars are of similar opinion.*

A comparative analysis of the essays showed that even some students who had used additives correctly in the same essays stumbled in their use of adversatives. Such errors could indicate that adversatives present students with more challenges than additives.

Evidence from thirty-two essays showed that some students habitually misuse the device 'on the other hand'. Oftentimes, a structure such as: *On the other hand, there is great need to understand the receiver's educational background*, just appeared out of the blue, before prior

discussion of “on the one hand”. Such sentences tended to compromise the logic of the ideas presented.

As with the additive, some students avoided using the adversative at all.

### **Correct use of causatives**

The essays analysed indicated that a sizeable number of learners used and seemed to be comfortable with causatives, particularly, ‘therefore.’ Such students were able to build up their arguments to justify harnessing of the causative of departure, especially where they were concluding the argument within a paragraph as well as at the end of the essay in general. One example taken from the end of a paragraph whose two preceding paragraphs had been highlighting the important duties a sender performs during communication wrapped up that position with the sentence: *Therefore, it can be noted that a sender plays an important role in communication.* Correct usage of the same was also noted in the conclusions of over twenty essays perused, as in this instance: *It can therefore be argued that both the sender and the receiver are significant players in the communication process.* In this case, the causative was used in a sentence summing up the discussion which had dutifully balanced both the sender’s and the receiver’s significant roles in the communication process.

Other causative devices correctly used were ‘As a result’ or its variant ‘Resultantly’; ‘thus’ and ‘hence’. An example extracted from an assignment, similar to the above, concluded as follows: *Resultantly, on the point of who is of greater importance between the sender and receiver, the essay considers both as equally important.* The sentence constituted part of a wrapping up of the essay whose thesis acknowledged the equally significant contributions of both sender and receiver.

The correct use of the causative device ‘So’ was, however, noted in a few assignments. The ‘so’ structure was sometimes used correctly to justify a particular position following a supply of evidence. An excerpt from one student’s essay went as follows: *So we would prefer communicators who recognize the importance and contributions of other players in communication.* This position was arrived at after the student had argued that in a communication transaction there could be some parties who consider themselves as more indispensable than others, when in fact, communication should be a complementary transaction. There was yet another correct use of cohesive device ‘so’, especially in concluding an essay as in: *So the reasons proffered in the essay make it right to conclude that two-way communication is not necessarily the best, though the most ideal one.* This followed the student’s balanced discussion of the two forms of communication in organisations. These

results showed that amongst the family of causatives, there were some which were more popular and easier used than others by students.

### **Wrong use of the causatives**

The greatest challenge with the use of the causative as reflected in most of the essays analysed, was that weak students just placed these devices anyhow. Such students demonstrated failure to thread the causative devices within their arguments. Evidence from the essays showed that most of these students just placed the causatives where they hardly improved the flow of the sentence, showing neither a proper buildup of points nor proper coherence of the paragraph. For instance, the researchers discovered hanging sentences such as: *Thus showing sender as paramount*, or: *Hence indicating it as the significant*.

Another example of misuse was in the form of overuse of related devices in the same sentence. The following sentence was taken from the concluding paragraph of one of the assignments analysed: *Therefore, for this reason, I thus conclude this discourse by stressing that two way communication has more benefits*. In this structure, there is unnecessary repetition, especially with 'for this reason' and 'thus.'

However, with the causative, a negligible number avoided its overall use, considering that most students wanted to be seen to be delivering a parting shot at the end of their essays, no matter how ineffectual it might have been.

### **Findings from interviews**

#### **The teaching of cohesive devices**

Interviews sought to establish insights from Communication Skills lecturers on how their students used or misused cohesive devices in academic essay writing. In order to do so, it was pertinent to find out first if the lecturers had taught the students on the importance of cohesive devices and how students could use them in their essays. All the Communication Skills lecturers pointed out that their module outlines emphasise academic writing as one of the pillars of the module since this writing component prepares students to write better essays in most modules across the university curriculum. Lecturers revealed that cohesive devices, including conjunctions, are discussed during the lectures on academic writing. Responding to a question on how their module addresses the issue of cohesive devices one lecturer said: *Apart from talking about interpreting demands of questions, acknowledgment of sources and general organisation of essay, in academic writing, we also talk about how best to synthesise and link scholarly arguments in the essay*.

The response showed that the lecturer was aware of the significance of teaching cohesive devices and discussed them in academic writing as indicated in the module outline which most Communication Skills lecturers claimed they distributed to every student at the beginning of the semester. Still on whether lecturers taught students about the role of cohesive devices in their essays, one lecturer revealed: *I give my students a handout that groups the common cohesive devices by class. I also include illustrations that I encourage the students to practise with so as to improve their own essays.*

The lecturers also indicated that they actually taught and practised how to use the devices with the students. As one of the lecturers observed: *During the lectures on academic writing, my students and I normally discuss a past assignment topic and how to deploy cohesive devices.*

### **How students handle additives, adversatives and causatives**

On how students used cohesive devices, one of the lecturers noted:

*The assignments demonstrate that some students use cohesive devices effectively, I find it satisfying that more than half of my Human Resources Honours degree students can connect ideas using additives, balance arguments using adversatives and conclude arguments with causatives. A few others, however, have conceptual problems regarding the meaning and handling of cohesive devices.*

The weak handling of cohesive devices by those struggling students that the lecturer above felt had conceptual problems is captured in the words of her colleague, thus:

*As for my B.Ed. Primary Pre-service degree students, most just splash cohesive devices in the essays without proper thinking and without any link. Students use common devices such as 'moreover', 'however' and 'thus', among others, anyhow. Others never attempt to use them at all.*

The lecturers also complained that, often, students who failed to properly use an additive such as 'furthermore' to indicate accumulating data also failed to rightfully place and utilise an adversative such as 'but'. They too cannot accurately use the causative 'resultantly' in bringing an argument to a conclusion. Lecturers noted that such problems were evident within the paragraph as well as across paragraphs. They also seemed to agree that students misused almost similar cohesive devices as if they shared their assignments. One of the senior lecturers noted:

*The mostly misused cohesive devices are those most commonly known and used by the students. For example, a student misuses 'furthermore', or uses it in a paragraph which does not show that many related issues have been discussed to warrant the use of 'furthermore', or using 'however' or 'nevertheless' where there is no contrast or counter argument being presented. The same thing happens whereby 'thus' and 'hence' are used yet there is nothing preceding either to justify that stance.*

### **Discussion**

Results from both documentary analysis and interview indicate that a respectable number of Zimbabwean university students at selected institutions appreciate the place of cohesive devices in their academic essays. That several students try to use cohesive devices, including conjunctions, shows that some students are aware that cohesion in academic essays is a hallmark of this crucial format of presenting well-knit scholarly arguments. The problem, however, comes on how to correctly and effectively utilise such connectives, including additive, adversative and causative cohesive devices so as to achieve cohesion in their essays. The results from essays generally indicate that a sizeable number of students use additive, adversatives and causatives effectively. This is in line with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model that underscores the importance of expressing 'logical-semantic' relation between sentences through adding more information, contrasting information and showing cause. This confirms what Bailey (2006) means where he notes that correct usage of cohesive devices ensures that a text becomes clearer and more readable. The correct use of additives, especially, shows that these connectives enable the students to explain related points continually or cumulatively, drawing on the support of more scholars, and to logically further explore related debates on the issue being illustrated or under discussion. This is in line with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) definition of conjunctions as devices that are a specification of how what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone on before. The additive was, therefore, found positioned mostly more than halfway through the paragraph, following some explanation or demonstration of fact, followed by the additional information signposted and also building towards an emphatic conclusion of the paragraph idea. The other popular position of an additive connector was as the topic sentence of a paragraph carrying a preceding argument further. Such positioning of the devices supports Bahaziq's (2016) contention that cohesion enhances interpretation.

It was, however, realised that some students sometimes confused adversatives or causatives for additives, thus causing incoherence, while others placed additives at wrong points in their

essays, leading to a breakdown in the flow of the essay. A worrying example cited was of the students who misused either 'In addition', 'Furthermore' or 'Moreover' in sentences or at beginnings of paragraphs where no prior mention of any related point had been made to warrant claim of adding more information. Johnson (2017), in his study in Peru, established similar findings in the misuse or overuse of certain cohesive devices in which his participants seemed so good and confident at 'saying nothing'. The misuse of additives in this current study could point to the general weaknesses in the selected Zimbabwean universities' first year students considering the view that the lecturers interviewed claimed to practise the use of cohesive devices together with their students in class. Weaknesses could also be because some of these students bunk Communication Skills lectures or feel shy to seek clarification during lectures. Weak students were also found to be stitching interchangeable additives in the same sentence, producing a tautological effect. This confirms Mang'oka, Ogola and Bartoo's (2019:32) study which found that hearing-impaired learners repeated related words, thereby breaking the sense in sentences and paragraphs. This current study's findings, however, suggest that even students who are not hearing-impaired sometimes misconstrue certain cohesive devices and struggle to use them effectively. All these errors and lapses indicate that although students are aware that additives are essential in academic essays, as is supported by lecturers who indicated that they distribute handouts with illustrations to all students, such students still show inadequate precision in their use as well as little or no understanding of the expected effect of these additives in their assignments.

Regarding adversatives, the results show that good students normally use these connectives to introduce either hesitancy in an argument concerning an earlier held view, bring balance in weight of the stated views, or to puncture a view that had been considered as tenable only recently in the paragraph. This has been evident where the students used the devices 'but', 'even though', 'yet', 'on the other hand', and 'however', among others. Generally, the adversative puts the student arguing in an enviable position since he or she is not necessarily categorical but reasonably appreciative of different ways of looking at the same issue. This resonates with Crossley, Yang and McNamara's (2014) argument that cohesive devices improve text comprehensibility and text cohesion. A more emphatic adversative, normally in the form of 'However', was found to appear midway in the essay or just towards the end where the student divides opinion in the essay through indicating departure from the main slant of the discussion and moves towards accommodating an almost alternative argument even as the text discourse remains hanging together.

Regrettably, students who struggled with adversatives demonstrated inability to use the connectives at all, which in most cases made both the argument and expression obscure, muddled or unclear. The adversatives ‘yet’, ‘nevertheless’ and ‘contrariwise’ confused students most. Less attentive students also mishandled the adversative ‘on the other hand’ by featuring it willy-nilly in the essay and thus raising doubts within the reader. These results tend to confirm what Hamed (2014) found regarding the inappropriate use of conjunctions in argumentative essays among Libyan university students. These problems, again, show that some students still cannot handle adversatives in their essays, thus compromising students’ effectiveness or convincingness in their discussions.

It also emerged, from the results, that the good student normally used the causative device to give a sound wrap-up to the argument build-up in a paragraph. A good student’s essay demonstrated that a correctly used causative does not just appear from nowhere but emerges from the essay’s threading of both additive and adversative material, leading up to a well-considered conclusion. The most commonly used causative devices included ‘therefore’, ‘as a result’ and ‘so’. As hinted on earlier, the causative normally appeared in the terminator-sentence of almost every paragraph and most certainly in the paragraph concluding the essay. Students’ nightmares with the causative device were demonstrated through their misuse of ‘thus’ and ‘hence’. Most weak students ended up creating fragmentary and incomplete sentences in their attempt to show cause in the argument. Another emerging weakness was to string together in one sentence alternative causative devices, especially as students tried to conclude an argument or the whole essay. This shows lack of conscious buildup of argument by students in their essays and absence of reflective use of connective devices among students therein.

The study found that additives, adversatives and causatives were used in almost equal measure in the good exemplar essays. It emerged that the students who used additives correctly were also likely able to correctly use adversatives and causatives in the same essays. This finding, which resonates with the views of some of the lecturers interviewed, however, seems to contradict some research findings which seek to rank the students’ preference of use of certain cohesive devices (Hananta & Sukyadi, 2015) and those which are skeptic about the link between cohesion and proficiency (McNamara, Crossley & McCarthy, 2010). This also tends to contradict the study by Kadiri, Igbokwe, Okebalama and Egbe (2016) in a Nigerian university, whose study noted that students tended to make use of one device at the expense of others. The sample used in this current study suggests that once a good Zimbabwean

university student decides to use cohesive devices, he or she tries all means to use all relevant devices though with differing correctness and effectiveness. This picture could be influenced by the fact that most Communication Skills lecturers in Zimbabwean universities, as they state, actually make a conscious effort to teach the use and placement of cohesive devices during their lectures. However, the results still show that a staggering number of students still had problems with the selected conjunctive devices as evidenced in many essays, among the selected, that lacked coherence, seemed flat in tone, those in which devices were strewn about willy-nilly, and those which avoided use of devices at all.

### **Conclusion**

The study has established that the majority of the students attempted using additives, adversatives and causal conjunctions in their essays, which was indicative of their awareness of the significance of these cohesive devices. The more able students used the connectives effectively, thereby producing cohesive and coherent essays. However, the weaker students misused and/or overused some of the conjunctions, and yet others failed to employ them where they were clearly required or expected, thereby creating the challenge of serious lack of cohesion and coherence in such students' academic pieces.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the findings, the study recommends that Communication Skills lecturers pay more attention to the teaching of the use of cohesive devices in academic writing, particularly additives, adversatives and causatives in whose use this study found that students manifested shortcomings. Also, the study recommends that the task of imparting skills of cohesion in academic writing should not be left to Communication Skills lecturers alone. Rather, all lecturers across the university curriculum could take the issue of academic writing seriously, particularly the aspect of cohesion, instead of the lecturers concentrating on subject matter or content alone. Another recommendation is that Communication Skills lecturers should encourage students to read and analyse a variety of authentic texts in English for them to be exposed to the effective use of cohesive devices, which can then be transferred to their academic essays. Finally, the study recommends that students need to be oriented to take academic writing as a process rather than as a product. This would ensure that the students go through all the stages of process writing, including proofreading or editing their work to improve on it.

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