Cohesion in the Abstracts of Undergraduate Dissertations: An Intra-disciplinary Study in a Ghanaian University

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ABSTRACT

Following the work of Santos (1996), studies on research articles and dissertation abstracts have elicited considerable attention. The present research examines grammatical cohesion in the Language and Literature abstracts of undergraduate dissertations presented to the Department of English of a public university in Ghana – the University of Cape Coast (UCC). A total of 50 abstracts (25 each from Language and Literature) constituted the data set for the study. Using mixed research design and drawing on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) influential theory of cohesion, the study points to three key findings. First, of Halliday and Hasan's four grammatical cohesive devices (that is, conjunction, reference, substitution, and ellipses) reference and conjunction are preponderantly used. Second, the use of these grammatical devices in the Language and Literature abstracts evinces more similarities than differences. Third, although undergraduate students studying English at the University of Cape Coast do use a range of grammatical cohesive devices, they seem to lack sophistication in their use. The findings of this study have implications for pedagogy, theory, academic writing and further research.

Key words: cohesion, undergraduate dissertation abstract, genre, discipline

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Following Swales' (1990) well-known publication on the introductions of research articles (RAs), interest in academic discourse among researchers in Applied Linguistics and other allied fields has garnered considerable attention. In this regard, various studies have explored the rhetorical aspects of the RA such as the acknowledgement (Giannoni, 1998), abstract (Santos, 1996; Stotesbury, 2003; Martin-Martin & Burgess, 2004), results (Brett, 1994), discussion (Holmes, 1997, 2001), conclusion (Yang & Allison, 2003), metadiscourse (Dahl, 2004), and addressee features (Hyland, 2001). Linguistic features such as subject (Gosden, 1993), collocation (Gledhill, 2000), and transitivity (Martinez, 2003) as far as the RA is concerned are also common in the extant literature.

Apart from the RA, other notable forms of academic discourse include textbooks, monographs, conference proceedings, critical reviews, edited collections, festschrifts, *viva voce*, and theses. Of these academic genres, however, one genre which continues to engage the attention of many scholars in Applied Linguistics, generally, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly, is the dissertation/thesis. In recent times, scholars have shown deep interest in such rhetorical features of the dissertation as generic structure (Swales, 2004), acknowledgement (Hyland, 2004; Kudjordjie, 2010), introduction (Bunton, 2002), literature review (Kwan, 2006; Akindele, 2009),

discussion (Dudley-Evans, 1986a), conclusion (Hewings, 1993; Bunton, 2005), citation practices (Thompson, 2000; Arhin, 2013), and metatext (Bunton, 1999). Certainly, this increasing interest in the different aspects of the thesis continues to provide both exciting and useful insights regarding the extent to which novices (learners) are socialized into the academic community.

A front rhetorical device, the abstract is considered one of the most essential units of the dissertation. It can either capture the attention of readers or leave them highly disappointed. Writers are required to demonstrate circumspection in this short 'preview' to the dissertation. An important role of abstracts lies in the fact that they do not merely seek to inform the reader, but to highlight relevant information and present principal knowledge claims (Hyland, 2000). Besides, abstracts can be considered as persuasive rhetorical tools. They also fulfil an important social function that allows readers to see how individuals work to position themselves within their communities (Hyland, 2000). As a result of the afore-mentioned factors, abstracts have attracted deep scholarly attention from researchers in Applied Linguistics and academic communication/discourse.

2.0 AIM OF THE STUDY

There is a gamut of studies on abstracts (e.g. Carter, 1990; Chang & Swales, 1999; Hewings & Buckingham, 2008; Asafo-Duho, 2013). Most of these studies on abstracts have investigated the schematic structure, other linguistic variables such as sentence length, articles, prepositions, and lexical density (e.g. Hartley 1994) as well as rhetorical strategies such as writer mediation, readability, personalization, and directness (e.g. Martin-Martin & Burgess, 2004). Cohesive elements in abstracts, however, seem to be under-researched in the literature on abstracts, the exception, being Keogh's (2008) study. Besides, most of these studies on abstracts which have focused on expert writing (that is, RAs), as far as we know, were conducted in non-African settings and were largely, located in mono-disciplinary and inter/cross disciplinary contexts. To fill the gap, the present study aims to investigate the grammatical cohesive elements in the abstracts of Language and Literature dissertations submitted to the Department of English at University of Cape Coast.

To clarify the aim of the study, the following research questions are asked:

1. Which grammatical cohesive elements are employed in the abstracts of Language and Literature undergraduate dissertations submitted to the Department of English?

2. What similarities and dissimilarities exist in the use of grammatical cohesive devices found in the abstracts of Language and Literature undergraduate dissertations submitted to the Department of English?

3.0 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Theoretical Lens

The conceptual thrust of this study is underpinned by Swales' (1990) concepts of discourse community and genre as well as Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of cohesion. Each of these sheds light on the present study.

'Discourse community', a term popularized by Swales, refers to a community of scholars who create, transmit and/or share knowledge through a normative use of language. Swales' (1990) 'discourse community' is often contrasted with Hymes' (1974) 'speech community'. Unlike the former, the latter is general, encompassing people who naturally share a common linguistic and sociolinguistic behaviour. While one is naturally born into a speech community, Swales (1990) avers that joining a particular discourse community is, largely, informed by personal orientation and motivation. Although initially the term 'discourse community' was perceived to be a homogenous construct, the more popular acceptance is its heterogeneity. Thus, discourse community can be viewed as a universal set consisting of subsets of discourse communities. In other words, each discipline has norms, expectations and conventions with respect to the creation, sharing and dissemination of knowledge (Becher &Trowler, 2001). Given this view, there is no gainsaying the fact that the norms of one discipline-specific community such as those interested in Literary Studies will not necessarily be the same as those of another discourse community interested in Engineering or Entomology and Wildlife.

As language is conventionally used within the discourse community to perform various social actions, it gives rise to the term 'genre'.Genre is a widely used term in the fields of rhetoric, literature, media and linguistics. Although the term dates as far back as the Graeco-Roman epoch, according to Afful (2005), it is only in recent years that it has been popularized, especially in the field of linguistics due to the works of notable scholars such as Swales (1990), Miller (1994), and Bhatia (2004). In Applied Linguistics, especially, genre is typified by various characteristics such as communicative purpose, content, form, intended audience (who are either members of a professional or academic community) and medium (spoken or written). Following from Swales (1990), Bhatia (2004) puts forward a comprehensive definition of genre:

> Genre, essentially, refers to language use in a conventionalized communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discoursal resources (p. 25).

The definition above indicates that as an institutional rhetorical template which allows users to accomplish a communicative purpose, a genre allows for individual choices, while admitting constraints and affordances.

The third concept to consider is 'cohesion'. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs when the interpretation of one element in a text is dependent on that of another. That is, one item pre-supposes the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. The place of cohesion in the abstract cannot be marginalized, given the highly informative nature of the abstract as well as its space constraints. Authors, therefore, deploy various salient linguistic and lexical tools to establish ties (a single instance of cohesion) in a terse communicative genre such as the abstract.

In this study, the dissertation is considered a genre of the academic community; its abstract, a sub-genre; and Language and Literature, the discipline-specific contexts from which the data is

drawn, are the discourse communities under consideration. At the outset, therefore, we expect that the abstracts from these two disciplines will largely employ different cohesive elements.

3.2 Some Previous Empirical Studies on Abstracts

Following Swales' (1990) assertion that abstracts continue to remain neglected by discourse analysts and scholars in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), much scholarly attention is now being given to the abstract. In the following section, therefore, we draw attention to the diverse perspectives brought to bear on the literature on abstracts in order to underscore the distinctiveness of the present work.

One of the earliest studies on abstracts of academic communication that adopt a genre analytical approach was the work by Santos (1996), who examined 96 research article abstracts in Applied Linguistics. He found that the RA abstracts had a five-move pattern, with sub-moves (referred to as 'steps') consistently embedded in the core moves. Specifically, Santos' study revealed that the five-move pattern of the abstract include situating the research (move 1), presenting the research (move 2), describing the method (move 3), summarizing the results (move 4), and discussing the results (move 5). Together, these moves and their optional steps, Santos notes, were used by writers as a time-saving device that enables readers to quickly capture the main points of an entire paper.

Following from Santos' (1996) study, various studies have emerged, either corroborating or repudiating the findings of Santos as far as the general formal schemata of research article abstracts are concerned. Salager-Meyer's (1992) study on research article abstracts in Medicine, Cross and Oppenheim's (2006) study in Protozoology, Hartley et al.'s (2003) study in Educational Psychology as well as Hyland's (2000) work all confirmed Santos' (1996) five-move model. However, studies by Busch-Lauer (1995), Dayrell (2009), and Li (2011) demonstrated that, unlike Santos' (1996) study, RA abstracts reflect a four-move pattern, which is widely reported in the literature as the IMRD model – introduction, methodology, results and discussion. A third strand is provided by a very recent study by Pho (2008) of the RA abstracts of Chinese linguistic journals which revealed a six-move model, with "Announcing the importance of the field" and "Claiming the implications" emerging as the two new moves. This is a major departure from the four or five-move model often discussed in the literature, although this needs to be either confirmed or contested in other studies.

Besides the overall rhetorical organization and pattern of progression of the abstract, the abstract (once again, especially of the RA) has gained considerable attention in the field of cross-linguistic studies (e.g. Martin-Martin, 2003; Martin-Martin & Burgess, 2004; Van Bonn & Swales, 2007). Given that research in contrastive rhetoric has palpably shown that writers express, structure/ organize and present ideas and research differently from one another due to the diversity of their culture, it is not surprising that several of such studies point to variations. In a genre study of the abstracts of Experimental Social Sciences, Martin-Martin (2003) compared RA abstracts in English and Spanish. Investigating the macro-structure of these texts based on the IMRD model, he concluded that the rhetorical structure of scientific discourse is not universal; instead, as expected, socio-cultural factors lead to differences in discourse

communities. In Van Bonn and Swales' (2007) study, although both English and French RA abstracts followed the IMRD model, variations emerged in linguistic features, including the voice of the verbs, personal pronouns, and transition words. Martin-Martin and Burgess' (2004) study on academic criticism in RA abstracts pointed to the fact that the rhetorical strategies used to convey academic criticism are influenced by socio-cultural and socio-pragmatic factors.

Still, from a contrastive rhetoric perspective, Ju (2004) investigated abstracts in English and Chinese RAs in the fields of Language Sciences and Applied Linguistics, and found that English abstracts usually have a more complete structure including all four moves in the IMRD model, while Chinese abstracts tended to omit the introduction and discussion moves. Jiang (2010) also conducted a contrastive study on the rhetorical structure of introductions in English and Chinese Applied Linguistics RAs. Like Ju (2004), Jiang also found that English abstracts had a more complicated schematic structure than the Chinese abstracts. Interestingly, the study of Nkemleke (2010) introduces Africa into the existing scholarship. Nkemleke found that although both Cameroonian and foreign conference paper abstracts exhibited rhetorical features that are identified with discourse community practices, there were major differences in the diversity and degree of depth with which such features were deployed in texts in the two cases.

Our final set of studies on abstracts concerns genre analytical studies conducted on the structure of abstracts from a multi-disciplinary perspective; studies in this field compare the rhetorical structure of abstracts across various disciplines. Specifically, Samraj (2005) compared RA abstracts from two closely related disciplines: Conservation Biology and Wildlife Behaviour. Analyzing 24 randomly selected abstracts from each of the two disciplines, she found that beyond the traditional moves, even abstracts from these closely related disciplines could vary in terms of linguistic features such as cohesive elements, conjunctions and pronoun preferences.

Pho (2008) also analysed the rhetorical organization, linguistic realization of moves and authorial stance in 30 abstracts from three journals in two disciplines, Applied Linguistics and Educational Technology. He noted that the combination of certain linguistic features (for example, grammatical subjects, verb tense and voice) helped to distinguish one move from the other across the two disciplines. Further, Melander, Swales and Fredrickson (1997) analysed RA abstracts writing in three disciplines (Biology, Medicine and Linguistics) in English and Swedish. In the cross-disciplinary and cross linguistic analyses, they found, not surprisingly, that both discipline and culture played important roles in writing. A very important study worth mentioning here is Dayrell (2009), given the very large corpora he employed. He compared 1,329 masters' theses and RA abstracts in four disciplines (that is, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physics, Engineering and Computer Science). The study revealed that there were dissimilarities in the lexico-grammatical choices of the abstracts written by learners and those written by experts. The study also proved that the abstracts were conditioned by discipline-specific contexts.

In summary, the review of related literature of the present research has demonstrated that numerous studies have been undertaken on abstracts. Whereas abstracts of expert writing (that is, RA) have been extensively researched, the abstracts of non-expert writing, in general, and undergraduate dissertations, in particular, have been under-researched. Further, the review above

points to the fact that African settings, including Ghana, have not featured prominently in these studies. More importantly, the issue of cohesion appears to have received very little attention, the notable exception being Keogh (2008) and Salager-Meyer (1992) who nonetheless did not conduct an intra-disciplinary study. In the light of the above, the present study seeks to fill the void identified in the literature.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data and Data Collection Procedure

The study is based on the analysis of abstracts of undergraduate Language and Literature dissertations presented to the Department of English at the University of Cape Coast (one of the eight public universities in Ghana) in the last decade (2002-2012). It excluded dissertations submitted in 2013 because the students were then still undertaking their research and had not written their abstracts yet.

A multi-stage sampling approach was adopted. First, a total of 100 abstracts were randomly collected, out of which 50 were purposively selected. The abstracts included 25 each from Language and Literature dissertations. The purposive sampling technique, thus, ensured that a judicious blend of language and literature abstracts was obtained. Besides, in order to ensure gender equality, 12 Language abstracts of males and 13 Language abstracts of females were selected, while for the Literature abstracts, those of 13 males and 12 females were selected. Additionally, the Literature abstracts comprised studies on African, African-American and European Literature.

4.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis of the data was strictly guided by the research questions. The two sets of data (undergraduate Language and Literature abstracts) were coded in order to make them distinct from each other. The Language abstracts were coded LA while the Literature abstracts were coded LIA (thus LA1 – LA25 and LIA1 – LIA25). The samples from the two sets of data remained unedited. Each abstract was analyzed independently, based on the four grammatical cohesive devices posited by Halliday and Hasan (1976): conjunction, reference, substitution and ellipsis.

Further, the study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis in a complementary manner. The quantitative procedures or techniques were purely descriptive statistics and included percentages and frequency counts of the various grammatical cohesive devices evident in the abstracts. This was meant to highlight the extent of usage of the grammatical cohesive devices. Concerning the content qualitative analysis, the coded data were organized into themes, patterns and relationships; these had a potential in enhancing interpretation of the study's findings. In the rest of the paper, we present the analysis and findings of the study.

5.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The section covers the analysis and discussion of data, guided by the two research questions. We start by focusing on the cohesive devices, followed by discussion of data related to the remaining question.

5.1Cohesive devices

5.1.1 *Conjunctions*

The analysis found that the four grammatical cohesive devices (that is, conjunction, reference, substitution, and ellipsis) posited by Halliday and Hasan (1976) were present in varying proportions in the data set. Supported by examples drawn from the data, each of these grammatical cohesive devices is succinctly delineated in order of their frequency of usage. We begin with conjunctions where we identified *and*, *also*, *finally*, *again*, *further*, *however*, *while*, *yet* and *but*as typical conjunctions used in the abstracts. The examples below illustrate the use of conjunction as a cohesive device in the abstracts:

1. The study **also** revealed that pupils tended to use the agentive passive more than the agentless passive. (LA1)
2. The essay concludes that Achebe is unable to portray the female in her entirety **while** Darko proves that she is up to the task. (LIA5)

In example 1, *also* has been used as an additive conjunction to give additional information whilst in example 2, *while* is used as an adversative conjunction to establish a sharp contrast between the two ideas expressed in the construction. We also notice that whereas *also* is medially used, *while* is used at clause initial position. These conjunctions, like those in Field and Oi's (1992) study on Cantonese L$_2$ speakers of English and L$_1$ speakers, are found, normally, in the following positions: initial paragraph position and initial sentence position. It is noteworthy, however, that a few conjunctions were positioned medially.

Generally, in the two sets of abstracts, conjunctions seem to be frequently used. It is evident from the two sets of data that undergraduate students tend to frequently use additive devices. Similar findings are found in Meisuo (2000) and Alarcon and Morales (2011), all of whom investigated undergraduate student essays. The frequent use of conjunctions, in general, and additives, in particular, may stem from the writers' strong desire to explicitly itemize their points or advance their arguments chronologically.

5.1.2 *Reference*

The analysis of the data set showed that both Language and Literature students use personal and demonstrative pronouns (personals and demonstratives) to refer to an item within the text. They included elements in the abstracts such as *it(s),they, their,his, them (selves)*, *this* and *these*. Examples of the use of reference to achieve cohesion within the abstracts are given below:

3. This thesis investigates the persuasive language used in advertisement in the Ghanaian National newspapers, the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*. **It** examines the knowledge resources, the language use.... (LA6)
4. The study explored women's dependence on men and the capability of women freeing **themselves** from all oppressive rules as female exploitation ... (LIA8)

In example 3, *it* makes a backward reference to *this thesis* and, therefore, they form a cohesive tie. Similarly, in example 4, *themselves* makes a backward reference to *women.* It can also be noticed from the examples above that in both instances, the reference items *it* and *themselves* are textual and not situational; hence, they are endophoric. From the two sets of data, it is evident that undergraduate students in the University of Cape Coast hardly use comparatives to refer to other elements within the same text. This may be due to the genre as well as the topic of the research. Since abstracts are usually brief and straight to the point, students may not have the time and space to engage in comparisons.

The discussion above shows that the use of reference as a cohesive device is common in the writings of undergraduate students, as already established by earlier studies (e.g. Meisuo, 2000; Alarcon & Morales, 2011). The discussion also confirms the common view that students' use of reference to achieve cohesion is, usually, tilted towards anaphoric or backward reference, and not cataphoric or forward reference. This finding is unsurprising in the light of the assumption that students are more interested in linking forthcoming ideas with preceding ideas.

5.1.3 *Substitution*

In the two sets of data analysed, substitution is scarcely used to achieve cohesion; only one instance was observed in the Literature abstracts, with none in the Language abstracts. The example below illustrates the use of substitution as a cohesive device in one of the literature abstracts:

5. There is no attempt at fine writing; not a word or phrase for effect; it is simple unadorned diction of **one** to whom the temptations of the pen seem to have been wholly unknown. (LIA10)

In the example above, the indefinite pronoun *one* substitutes for *fine writing.* Halliday and Hasan refer to this kind of substitution as nominal substitution. This finding differs from earlier findings (e.g. Johnson, 1992) that revealed that verbal substitution and, not nominal substitution, is common in the writings of students. This dissonance in findings in the previous studies and the present study may largely be attributed to the different style of the students whose essays and/or dissertations were used for the study. Additionally, the difference in the data of the previous studies and the present study could account for the dissimilarity in finding with respect to the kind of substitution evident in students' writing. For instance, whereas the previous studies made use of students' essays, the present study made use of undergraduate dissertation abstracts; and against the backdrop that abstracts (the genre under study) are relatively shorter than essays, the difference in finding between the previous studies and the present study is not very surprising.

5.1.4*Ellipsis*

Like substitution, ellipsis was rarely used in both the Language and Literature abstracts analysed. In the two sets of data, an elliptical construction was realized in only one instance in a Language abstract:

6. In view of this, the study made some recommendations to remedy the situation; **some** drew the attention of heads of second cycle institutions....(LA11)

In the example above, it is observed that the prepositional phrase, *of the recommendation* which is supposed to be a post modifier to the headword *some* has been deleted. The construction, however, remains meaningful because information can be retrieved from other elements in the text.

That ellipsis is minimal in the writings of students, as observed in the present study, is not a new finding. Indeed, it corroborates the finding of the studies which investigated how non-native English language students create cohesive and coherent texts. This may stem from the often unstated assumption that elliptical constructions result in ambiguity or semantic plurality, and given that the abstract is a vital sub-genre of the entire dissertation or thesis, one cannot sacrifice clarity of meaning for economy.

Essentially, the analysis above on the type of grammatical cohesive elements employed in the abstracts shows that the discourse community (here, academia) and the genre understudy (undergraduate dissertation abstract) can influence the presence or absence of the various cohesive elements within the abstract. For instance, academic writing is governed by specific rules; similarly, abstract writing is informed by certain generic moves and steps (in the words of Swales, 1990), besides the brevity of space. In view of this, it is expected (as evidenced by the analysis) that in the abstract, some cohesive elements would be preferred to others. The frequency of distribution of the various cohesive devices is discussed in the next phase of the analysis of the data.

5.2 Frequency of Occurrence of Cohesive Devices
In this section, we discuss the frequency of occurrence of cohesive devices of the Language and Literature abstracts of undergraduate dissertations. The table displays the total distribution of cohesive devices in the two sets of data.

Table 1: Distribution of the cohesive devices in Language and Literature abstracts

Type of Cohesive Device	Frequency of Language Abstracts	Frequency of Literature Abstracts	Total	Percentage %

Conjunction	111	111	222	74.49
Reference	20	54	74	24.83
Substitution	0	1	1	0.34
Ellipsis	1	0	1	0.34
			298	100.00

According to Table 1, conjunction is the most frequently used cohesive device in the Language and Literature abstracts. Interestingly, it occurred the same number of times (111 times) in both abstracts, representing 74.49 per cent. This finding is not surprising, given that virtually all writers seek to communicate their intentions sequentially.

This finding is also in tandem with Alarcon and Morales' (2011) study on cohesive devices used by undergraduate students in their argumentative essays. In their study, conjunctions occurred 326 times, representing 53.37 per cent. As is evident in Table 1, additives are the conjunctions frequently used in both abstracts, occurring 105 times in the Language abstracts and 109 times in the Literature abstracts, accounting for 96.4 per cent. Johnson (1992) and Meisuo's (2000) study reported similar findings. Adversatives immediately follow additives as a cohesive device in Language and Literature abstracts submitted to the English Department. While they occurred 6 times in the Language abstracts, they occurred twice in the Literature abstracts, representing 3.60 per cent. Causal and temporal conjunctions were not realized in both sets of data, perhaps, due to the nature of the genre under study and the topic of research, as previously indicated.

Next to conjunction in terms of frequency of occurrence was reference. It occurred 20 times in the Language abstracts and 54 times in the Literature abstracts, altogether representing 24.83 per cent. That reference was frequently used in the two sets of data is unsurprising, given that writers usually want to link preceding ideas with those that are forthcoming. Moreover, the use of reference as a cohesive device seems to be an easy option for undergraduate students as far as ensuring unity within a text like the abstract is concerned. Meisuo's (2000) study on the expository essays of Chinese undergraduate students also supports the present finding – that undergraduate students frequently use reference in addition to conjunction in order to achieve cohesion within their texts.

The next two tables present the distribution of personals, demonstratives, and comparatives (types of reference cohesive devices) on one hand and types of conjunctions on the other hand.

Table 2: Frequency of reference cohesive devices in the texts

Type of Cohesive Device	Frequency of Language Abstracts	Frequency of Literature Abstracts	Total	Percentage %
Personals	15	47	62	83.78
Demonstratives	5	7	12	16.22
Comparatives	0	0	0	–
			74	100.00

As can also be seen from Table 2, personals and demonstratives were usually used by the students in order to make references. In the two sets of data, personals occurred 62 times (83.78 per cent), while demonstratives occurred 12 (16.22 per cent) times. There was no instance of the use of comparatives to make reference to other elements in order to form a cohesive tie. This may be, partly, as a result of students' ignorance regarding the use of comparatives to make reference or the lack of need for their usage within the abstracts under study.

Table 3: Frequency of the conjuncture cohesive devices in the texts

Type of Cohesive Device	Frequency of Language Abstracts	Frequency of Literature Abstracts	Total	Percentage %
Addition	105	109	214	96.40
Adversative	6	2	8	3.60
Causal	0	0	0	–
Temporal	0	0	0	–
			222	100.00

As can be seen from Table 3, additives and adversatives constitute the most frequently used conjuncture devices while the rest were not used in both data sets. The conspicuous absence of causal and temporal cohesive devices in the Language and Literature abstracts of undergraduate dissertation may stem from students' unfamiliarity with these cohesive devices or simply because they were not needed in the texts. Again, we notice how the abstract genre has the potential to influence the use of a cohesive element.

The discussion on the frequency of occurrence of the various grammatical cohesive devices in the present data set suggests that there are relative frequency differences in the deployment of the various cohesive devices. To this end, we opine that the various cohesive devices do not have only differing uses but also varying levels of importance, at least to undergraduate students. More importantly, we observe also that the preponderant or minimal use of a cohesive element within the abstract is likely to be conditioned by at least two factors – the nature of academic writing (given that Language and Literature are academic disciplines) and the abstract genre itself.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, we have explored the extent to which grammatical cohesive devices are realized in the Language and Literature abstracts of undergraduate dissertations submitted to the Department of English of a public Ghanaian university. The study also sought to establish, if any, the similarities and dissimilarities in the use of these cohesive devices in the two corpora.

Given the results of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn. In the abstracts of undergraduate dissertations, all four grammatical cohesive devices (that is, conjunction, reference, substitution and ellipses) are used, conjunction and reference elements being preponderantly used. The study also showed that similar linguistic resources are used to realize these cohesive devices in both the Language and Literature abstracts. Second, the similarities are

much more evident than the differences in the use of grammatical cohesive devices in the Language and Literature abstracts. The study also found that some undergraduate students of English of the University of Cape Coast lack sophistication in the extent to which they utilized these cohesive devices.

The findings of this study have three implications. First, the study has implications for writing pedagogy at the undergraduate level, in general, and abstract writing, in particular. By emphasizing students' use of grammatical cohesion in abstracts, the present study throws light on students' use of cohesive devices (for instance, substitution and ellipsis). Thus, the study, generally, is of importance to teachers and writing instructors in their bid to help undergraduate students achieve cohesion in their writing. By revealing, for instance, the lack of sophistication on the part of undergraduate students as regards their use of cohesive elements in the abstract, this study has a practical pedagogical value. Second, the study has implications for the theory of cohesion, in general, and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of cohesion, in particular. The theoretical position that within a given text, irrespective of the length or type of genre and/or register, unity (ties) and argumentation can be achieved is amply supported in the study. In this regard, the results of the study show that although the abstract is relatively short in length, there was a conscious attempt on the part of the students to establish formal links within their texts and connections between the various parts of their constructions. Third, the findings of the present study add to the ever-widening scope of scholarship on academic discourse, in general, and disciplinary writing, in particular, by focusing on a sub-genre such as the abstract. Besides, by emphasizing undergraduate dissertation abstract, a sub-genre relatively under-researched in the literature, the present study sheds light on this essential rhetorical unit of the dissertation, and significantly contributes to existing studies on academic communication.

The efforts in this study will be rewarding if the findings of this study provide the impetus for further studies into undergraduate dissertation abstracts. Similar studies can, for instance, be conducted on undergraduate dissertation abstracts in different but other closely related disciplines in order to ascertain the extent to which the findings of the present study can be generalized. Other studies can also adopt an inter-disciplinary approach to examine these abstracts to establish whether or not grammatical cohesion in undergraduate dissertation abstracts is conditioned by discipline-specific proclivities. Finally, the present research examined only grammatical cohesion in a relatively small sample of Language and Literature undergraduate dissertation abstracts. It would be useful to investigate lexical cohesion in the abstracts of undergraduate dissertations.

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