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Analysis of EFL Academic Writing in a Saudi University

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ANALYSIS OF EFL ACADEMIC WRITING IN A SAUDI UNIVERSITY

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is the foundation of the renaissance of nations.

Introduction to the King Abdullah Scholarship Program

The higher education systems in the Arabian Gulf countries\(^1\) and Saudi Arabia in particular have advanced and changed tremendously over the last half century and particularly in the last two decades. These systems have changed primarily to advance the individual country and its citizens in all aspects and on all levels including economic, academic, cultural, technological, and global. A great deal of the advancement has roots in Islamic teachings, and change has been influenced by increased student population, demands of the job market, and the influence of international higher education (Al-Anqari, 2014; Saleh, 1986). The Gulf countries have now consumed aspects of Western higher education with thousands of students being sent abroad, implanted ‘satellite’ campuses, and North American or European curricula supporting new majors based on public and private demands for a knowledge-based economy. With this influx of international higher education influence, the youth of Gulf countries, countries entrenched historically in

\(^1\)According to Henderson (2014), the Arabian Gulf countries are nations that border the Arabian Gulf, also referred to as the Persian Gulf: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sultanate of Oman, and Qatar. Iraq, Iran, and Yemen also border the Gulf but are not part of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and are not referred to as Gulf countries in this study.
national and cultural identities, are embracing globalization and international standards of quality and accreditation.

In the era of globalization, English has become the dominant *lingua franca* and for Saudi Arabia, in particular, the Ministry of Education (MOE) realized long ago that to advance globally, English language instruction was imperative not only for communication with international people but for modernization in necessary aspects of daily life and national independence (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Further, in certain fields of study, English is the primary language for research, curricula, and technological support. English has not been given official status as a second language in the country; however, it is given substantial significance as the primary foreign language taught in Saudi government schools, and several companies and universities use English as the language of communication and instruction.

As an academic and a professional, I am interested in how students with a native or first language (L1) of Arabic write academically in their second language (L2) of English and construct meaningful text. The more I teach writing to students from all backgrounds in Saudi Arabia (private- or government-schooled, from different parts of the country, different families, tribes, and socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.), the more I realize that some aspects of their academic writing, such as format and organization, are consistent and can be adjusted or modified fairly easily and quickly while others require more time; obvious patterns of language usage in their writing have emerged. These patterns often directly reflect their L1 and their own cultural means of communication. If these patterns at varying levels of proficiency are described, researched and known, particularly related to functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), which views grammar structures and word choices as tools to make meaning in a social context, then future educators can have a general foundation from which to begin and spend their instructional time wisely.
and efficiently to enhance their students’ L2 academic writing, particularly genre-based writing. This capstone then aspires to add to descriptive analytic research of L2 academic writing of Saudi higher education students to give further guidance and foundation to L2 writing educators.

Through my experiences with my children, I have realized that native speaker does not equal native writer. I have lived in the Kingdom for 15 years and have four bilingual, bicultural American-Saudi children whose L1 is English. Baker (2006) states that academic writing takes considerably longer to develop and needs to be taught in an academic environment. I have seen this first-hand with my children as there are noticeable syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic gaps in their writing. For this reason, I am interested in academic writing not only from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL)\(^2\), L2 perspective, but an L1, bilingual Arabic/English dimension; writing is the last academic skill to develop in my experience for native speakers and non-native speakers alike.

Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

Higher education in Saudi Arabia has flourished since 1957 when the first university, King Saud University, was opened in Riyadh. By 2014, Saudi had opened 25 government and 27 private universities and colleges, and established the Ministry of Higher Education (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014a, 2014b). The Saudi government considers higher education a crucial component to the advancement and sustainability of the country and has taken several steps to promote higher education.

\(^2\) Usually EFL would be used to refer to English use in this context as Saudi is a non-native English-language environment; however, the acronyms are used interchangeably at times for this project as some participants are not EFL students rather ESL as they have attended schools in L1 English countries or have L1 English parents and therefore have been raised in an L1 or ESL environment.
Financially, Saudi Arabia has allocated billions of dollars toward modernization and advancement in the education sector. In the Ninth Five-Year Developmental Plan, economic and developmental plans which intend to advance the country into a knowledge-based society and economy, Saudi Arabia allocated 50.6% of its spending budget to Human Resources—defined as education and training programs—for a total of $195 billion through 2014 (Ninth Five-Year Plan, n.d.). The Human Resources or education budget is set to expand the student capacity of educational facilities from primary to higher education and promote research in all fields, particularly in the needed science and technology fields. In May 2014, the Saudi education minister announced that King Abdullah approved an additional $21 billion five-year plan for the education sector focused on opening educational facilities (Reuters, 2014).

Further and perhaps the most notable advancement in higher education, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) was created by Royal Decree in 2005 and extended in 2010, based and designed on the idea of further educating Saudi youth, male and female, to study in higher education both abroad and in-Kingdom in fields needed by the Saudi market (King Abdullah Scholarship Program, 2014).

Saudi Arabia has also introduced quality assurance and international learning domains at the higher education level. The National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Developing Core Competencies in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2014) has provided a clear framework for the learning domains, qualifications, and characteristics of quality academic programs and graduates that are consistent across universities and colleges and meet international standards.
In an effort to maintain and promote quality academic programs, increase graduation rates, and to meet the needs of the labor market, the current trend in Saudi higher education is to enhance incoming students’ language, technical, and cognitive skills through preparatory programs (Alaqeeli, 2014). This is considered a transition year between high school and university. As English has become the medium of instruction (EMI) in several universities, particularly those offering instruction in the health, technology, business, and engineering sciences, universities begin preparing students before education in the field of study begins (Clarke, 2007; Lange 2013). In Saudi, these preparatory programs (also called core curriculum or general studies), which focus on English, mathematics, communication, computer skills, study skills, and natural sciences, have developed over the past decade and are focused on preparing students for university study. Freshmen students enter university with varying levels of English based on their primary, intermediate, and secondary school experiences—private education equals 12 years of English with varying hours of English instruction; public education currently means seven years of English instruction beginning in 6th grade for two hours per week (Al-Seghayer, 2011). The number of hours and type of instruction varies widely depending on the type of school and its philosophy of English education. As students enter with wide ranges of English language abilities, programs in higher education assess and instruct the traditional four modalities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, supported by the sub-skills of grammar and vocabulary.

The English language component of the preparatory year plays a major role (sometimes credited toward graduation) and can even determine if a student enters his/her planned program of study depending upon the grade earned. So, depending upon the university, English in Saudi higher education is perceived as a vehicle or means to
understanding the major content or, at some universities, an academic content course that is heavily weighted, like a math or science course. In the former, English is not usually credited; in the latter, the preparatory course is credited. University preparatory programs in the region offer intensive English instruction, up to 20 hours a week, in the four modes to prepare students for formal university education. An e-learning component and some sort of course management system usually accompany the English instruction (DynEd, Blackboard, publisher-based e-learning platform, etc.).

Due to several factors including language transfer of the L1, less focus on productive skills and student-centered learning methodologies in the more traditional K-12 L1 classrooms, and just the difficulty of academic writing in general, writing is the mode that often requires the most instructional attention of the productive skills in English for students with an L1 of Arabic. In my experience, Saudi students have stronger L2 speaking skills than writing skills, possibly stemming from their oral cultural background, an L1 tendency, in this case, to explain ideas, values and situations historically through the spoken word, which also affects their writing, particularly organizational patterns (Slikas Barber, 2002). In her case study on Qatari students, Al-Buainain (2009) contends that students are not taught writing strategies and are weak in writing in their L1 of Arabic, which naturally leads to L2 writing difficulties. This study concurs with Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali’s (2000) research on Jordanian students’ written essays that showed cohesion and tense issues in L2 that transferred from and added to the same language difficulties in the L1. Research has been conducted on various aspects of Saudi and Gulf students’ L2 academic writing although these studies often focus on one syntactic or discourse aspect of writing such as articles (Alhaysony, 2012) or discourse markers (Al-Yaari, Al Hammadi, Alyami, & Almalflehi, 2013). Still, there are wider implications that can provide a foundation for researchers and educators to build upon. Academic writing, the focus of this
research, is arguably the most difficult skill for Saudi students but certainly one of the most important in higher education for students to succeed in their academic careers (Al-Buainain, 2009). This research will not focus on the traditional one or two discrete structural aspects of writing as is prevalent in most L2 writing studies of L1 Arabic speakers. Rather, this study, which will use the paradigm of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), will focus on description of the language used for cohesion and unity to make meaning in L2 writing.

Introduction to Concept and Terms of SFL

Michael Halliday’s (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), described further in Chapter Two, is an all-encompassing linguistic model of viewing language and grammar as a means of creating socially-constructed meaning within a cultural context (Eggins, 2004). SFL focuses on the process of creating meaningful discourse, not simply viewing language and language learning and teaching in isolated areas such as content, organization, etc. It allows these areas to overlap and build upon each other to create meaning in discourse through three overarching (meta) functions: the subject matter (including the participants and process or the who and what they are doing) is related to the ideational function; the mode or channel of communication is related to the textual function and includes cohesive devices and organizational patterns or coherence; and the interpersonal function focuses on the relationship between the audience and author and characters within the text (Derewianka & Jones, 2010). As SFL is an inclusive and entire system of describing language, this research will focus on one area only, namely the textual metafunction, concentrating on overall cohesion and coherence within the participants’ writing.
Guiding Research Question

Based on the need for more extensive research in the field of EFL academic writing with higher education students who have an L1 of Arabic, the main guiding purpose for this project is to investigate and describe what patterns emerge from EFL/ESL academic writing using a Systemic Functional Linguistic theoretical paradigm. As shown in the literature review in Chapter Two, few studies in the region focus on the functional aspect of language and grammar to create meaning for students with an L1 of Arabic.

With this purpose in mind, this research will address the following main question:

In a Saudi higher education context for female preparatory year students, what patterns of language use to demonstrate coherence and cohesion emerge from a descriptive analysis of students’ autobiographical recount L2 writing?

Summary

This chapter introduced the study’s context of higher education in Saudi Arabia, the rationale and purpose of researching Saudi L2 academic writing and the SFL paradigm. Further, the guiding question of this research was presented. Chapter Two will provide relevant background and prior research on L2 writing at the international and regional levels and further explanation of the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in relation to genre pedagogy. Chapter Three will present the research methodology used including research paradigm, design, site, and overview of participants and finally the research ethics that were implemented. Chapter Four will discuss the descriptive analysis of the students’ writing using the textual metafunction to investigate students’ language patterns to create cohesive texts. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss and connect this analysis and present pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This research studies what patterns emerge from Saudi female students’ L2 autobiographical academic writing using the textual metafunction of SFL focusing on language and devices to construct cohesive and coherent texts.

Chapter Two begins with a brief explanation of coherence and cohesion. Relevant research on L2 academic writing in higher education internationally and within the Gulf and Middle Eastern countries is then presented, emphasizing the need for further research and inquiry into L2 academic writing in the region. The review of research conducted in the region highlights that previous studies were based on research and instructional patterns of descriptive and statistical error analysis, pre/post written exam research design, process writing methods, and genre-based pedagogy. Further, the model of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is defined and discussed in relation to L2 writing in this chapter. The three overarching metafunctions that guide the model and that are the foundation for this research are also reviewed. Finally, genre-based pedagogy, theory and application in relation to SFL in L2 writing are presented.

Definitions of Coherence and Cohesion

Before discussing the research on L2 academic writing, a brief overview of coherence and cohesion, two main elements of this study and the textual metafunction, which are further explained in Chapter Four, is necessary. The Canadian Language Benchmarks (Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) & Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB), 2012) present clear and concise definitions and distinctions between
coherence and cohesion. A cohesive text, a text where the elements are explicitly linked intra- and inter-sententially does not necessarily mean a coherent text, which is based on semantic relations and overall linking of ideas and concepts (Conner, 1996). Coherence then is based on the logical connection of ideas, the underlying map to the piece of writing showing direction and flow (CIC & CCLB, 2012). Cohesion as explained by Halliday and Hasan (1976) is represented by the elements, often referred to as cohesive devices, within the text that tie one piece of text to another. The authors discuss five types of cohesive devices, both grammatical and lexical, discussed further in Chapter Four. In practice, coherence, also referred to as unity in language classrooms, is then demonstrated through text openers and paragraph openers such as a thesis or topic sentences that move the audience logically and semantically through the writing. Cohesion is shown through devices that link the text between and within sentences such as a participant or subject later referred to as he/she/it (reference) or using parents who were previously or later referred to as guardians (synonym) or mom and dad (reiteration).

International Research on L2 Academic Writing

English as a second and foreign language learning has become essential in the increasingly global world where English no longer belongs to native countries but rather the world. With this globalization of education through English, each skill has been researched, and teaching models and approaches advanced. Hinkel (2005), in her overview of L2 writing research, discusses the research that began over 50 years ago in native-speaking (NS) countries prompted by the large numbers of international students entering universities. As English spread around the world as the language of education in many fields in the past several decades, English as a foreign language education (not only English literature or linguistics as content areas) and therefore EFL research and strategies
became essential reading and tools in EFL teaching and learning, particularly in academic writing.

Hinkel (2005) reviews and summarizes L2 writing research by the language use at the macro and micro levels. At the macro or discourse level, Hinkel mentions research on “discourse organization, structuring, topic appropriateness, development, ….text cohesion, coherence, clarity, and style” (p. 526), which coincides with the current research site’s rubric as features of content and organization. She cites research that not only emphasizes the rhetorical paradigm differences between cultures and languages but also research that argues the students’ lack of L2 experience could explain the differences in L1 and L2 writing at the macro level. At the micro level, she summarizes studies that focus on vocabulary and grammar, emphasizing the difficulties NNS have with these features. NNS use of these structures is often limited and simplified (Hinkel, 2003) as compared to native speakers (NS), even after years of study in the country. Considering the vast research that has been conducted, Hinkel still concludes that “research on what L2 writers need to learn, what they should be able to do, and how L2 writing can be efficaciously taught is conspicuously lacking” (p. 535).

Storch’s (2009) study in Australia shows that L2 writers improve in structure and idea development (i.e., content) over a semester of university study, but L2 accuracy and linguistic complexity does not significantly change. This coincides with my experience thus far in L2 writing where the broad areas of organization and content can be improved significantly in 14 weeks of instruction, but the underlying language that supports grammar and vocabulary choices is still noticeably absent after a semester of academic writing. Hinkel (2005) concurs, adding that children and adults alike need considerable time, even years of instruction, to write accurately at the age-appropriate proficiency level.
Tshotsho (2014) studied the L2 academic writing of 20 university students in South Africa using SFL. The research suggests that the students labeled ‘competent’ use more reference markers, elaborate cohesive devices and participants in their writing as compared to those labeled as not competent. The author also focuses on the register of competent students noting that the more advanced students use more formal academic English and link participants and processes in their language choices while less advanced students could not discern the register. These findings point to the importance of explicit instruction of textual features in academic English writing.

Crossley and McNamara (2012) studied a corpus of over 500 texts written by Hong Kong high school students. Contrary to several L2 writing studies, the researchers found that high proficiency L2 students use fewer cohesive devices than those perceived as lower proficiency. The authors argue that advanced L2 writers write for equally proficient readers who need fewer cohesive devices, a “reverse cohesion effect” (p. 16). This result is specifically relevant to this capstone, which will describe and examine students’ uses of cohesive devices. Although Crossley and McNamara’s results do not represent the norm of L2 writing research, which suggests higher proficiency equals greater use of cohesive devices, they do illustrate another perspective and possibility for this capstone’s results, which were considered. The study also revealed that the advanced proficiency Hong Kong students, as with other international students, showed broader vocabulary choices than their lower proficiency counterparts, which concurs with previous research. Crossly and McNamara also argue in their research that learning to write is more demanding than learning other skills, and a deeper understanding of linguistic features, particularly related to cohesion and complexity, will produce better understanding of L2 writing.

Giridharan and Robson (2011) conducted a case study analyzing the L2 academic writing of 206 foundation-year tertiary students in Malaysia. The researchers employed
Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach (Turuk, 2008) to writing as an interactive and constructive process, highlighting that although students felt they knew cohesive devices and supporting content strategies in isolation, they had difficulty using these structures and related language by themselves and within the required academic context. The study argues that writing skills not only affect English language courses but impact general academic performance as well and that students should not be taught only correct language but effective and appropriate language for the context in which they are writing (Pratt-Johnson, 2008, as cited in Giridharan and Robson, 2011). The study also shows the students’ lack of confidence in their language proficiency as demonstrated by the fact that the majority of students could not successfully revise their own work. The researchers suggest several educational implications, one of which focused on the need for genre-specific teaching to focus students’ language in the target area.

Paiva and Lima’s (2011) small case-study in Brazil comparing a NS expert and a NNS writing sample illustrates how students’ work could be assessed through SFL’s textual metafunction. The study focuses on thematic progression and cohesive devices based in grammar and vocabulary. The authors emphasize the need for deeper analysis of students’ writing rather than the traditional surface-level approach for assessment. In their conclusions, the researchers argue that using the SFL approach and specifically the textual metafunction to analyze and eventually assess student writing will actually lead to more useful teacher feedback and help teachers as well as students explicitly understand the organizational patterns of their work.

These research studies and several others reviewed illustrate that no matter the country of research or L1, writing is repeatedly mentioned as the productive skill of concern in academic contexts and has been for decades (Crossley & McNamara, 2010). As highlighted in the studies, academic writing is the most necessary productive skill for
higher education students to master for a variety of reasons. As Bjork and Raisenen (1997, as cited in Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000) suggest,

We highlight the importance of writing in all university curricula not only because of its immediate practical application, i.e. as an isolated skill or ability, but because we believe that, seen from a broader perspective, writing is a thinking tool. It is a tool for language development, for critical thinking and, extension, for learning in all disciplines (p. 175).

Regional Studies on L2 Academic Writing

As discussed in Chapter One, several studies dating back to the 1960s (Kaplan, 1966, as cited in Khuwaileh and Al Shamouli, 2000) have been conducted in intensive and preparatory programs on L2 academic writing in the Gulf region and Middle East for students who have an L1 of Arabic. Many of these studies discuss and emphasize interlingual transfer during the period students are initially learning a language, and intralingual transfer as students progress in the new language and form their interlanguage. Other scholars, particularly researchers writing on English as L2 academic writing, focus on errors, the writing process, and pedagogical implications for improved L2 academic writing. However, as shown with the six regional L1 Arabic studies featured here, few studies that focus on L2 academic writing even mention SFL or functional grammar in their analyses, highlighting a gap in the literature and the fact that SFL is an unfamiliar theoretical paradigm in the region.

In her case study with 40 first-year Qatari university students, Al-Buaimain (2009) found several difficulties in L2 academic writing. Specifically, she focuses on what she refers to as “the most frequent Arabic errors in English” (p. 4), which include verb usage (tense and aspect), the copula be verb, articles (particularly the definite article), and fragments. Al-Buaimain (2009) writes that methods of teaching, feedback, and assessment
need to be improved in the region. This article mentions direct L1 interlanguage transfer in the areas of verb tense and aspect where L1 learners have more difficulty with progressive and perfect aspects and the well-known present-tense copula *be*, according to Al-Buainain (2009), but it does not directly connect the grammar mistakes to the function to create meaning. Further, this is one of the only research articles focused on L1-L2 Arabic-English writing that, when referring to teaching implications, mentions the Sydney School (influenced and related to SFL along with genre pedagogy, according to Rose, 2008) as a “loose grouping of pedagogical approaches” (p. 7) highlighting that SFL has not found a strong foundation yet in the region.

The L1 interlingual transfer implications from the previous study concur with Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali’s (2000) research on 150 Jordanian university students’ written essays. The researchers found that the essays showed cohesion, organization, and tense issues in L2 that transferred from and added to the same language difficulties in the L1. In other words, cohesive devices, tenses, subject-verb agreement, and textual references were not used effectively in either language in many cases—L1 or L2. The authors also found that students had more than one main idea in paragraphs and particularly in Arabic, students used extremely lengthy noun groups with several relative clauses, and sentences which would be considered run-on sentences in English. Khuweilah and Alshoumali (2000) concluded their study with implications about the importance of literacy in the students’ L1 and awareness of text differences in English not through transfer or translation but explicitly taught awareness. This article did discuss the function of the language particularly in the textual metafunction that focuses on text cohesion.

Alhaysony (2012) focused on a descriptive error analysis of definite and indefinite articles used by 100 second-semester female students at a Saudi university. She found
through analyzing their compositions that interlingual transfer in using articles accounted for more than half (57%) of the errors and the remainder were attributed to intralingual errors, emphasizing the role of their L1 but also the movement into an interlanguage phase in their freshman year. While Alhaysony’s research is not directly related to this study and problems with English articles are not exclusive to L1 Arabic learners, the author’s study again emphasizes the role of L1 Arabic transfer and possible links and implications for creating meaningful text at the freshman university level.

Al Tahaineh (2014) published an extensive review of error analysis research on pitfalls in L1 Arabic learners’ language, focusing on the written language. The three areas the researcher highlighted were prepositions, articles, and discourse markers, all consistent with previously cited research. Similar to Alhaysony’s (2012) findings, Tahaineh’s (2012) empirical study on 162 university L1 Arabic students found that interlingual transfer accounted for 58% of the errors in prepositions with the remaining attributed to intralingual errors. In relation to articles, Al Tahaineh argues that the most frequent error in noun phrases occurs in the use of articles, which is not uncommon for NNS with any language background as correct use of the English article system is one of the last discrete language skills to be acquired. Although not the focus of Al Tahaineh’s research, these pitfalls studied, particularly discourse markers, can be directly connected to SFL research on cohesive devices to create meaning.

Similarly, Al-Yaari et al. (2013) studied the in-class utterances of 200 male EFL learners across Saudi Arabia focusing on English Discourse Markers (EDM). Although the study was based on spoken English of secondary school students, the implications are relevant to this study as the discourse markers are related to the larger genre and textual metafunction of language illustrating cohesion and organizational devices to create meaning in either spoken or written discourse. Al-Yaari et al. found that connectives and
and *but* and adverb *also* are used the most as discourse markers for these Saudi EFL students in spoken language, which concurs with my Saudi tertiary students’ written language as well. The researchers also found that the markers are often substituted incorrectly, a transfer from L1 in some cases, which distorts the meaning and that Saudi EFL students use discourse markers less than speakers of other languages and native speakers.

Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007) studied 51 third-year Saudi male students’ L2 compositions, focusing specifically on whether or not a writing checklist, peer feedback, and two-draft essay ‘interventions’ in writing would provide improvement in the quality of writing. Writing samples were done before and after the drafting and reviewing ‘intervention.’ While the feedback on revision and multi-draft essays were positive from the students’ perspective and improved the overall mechanics, the researchers did not find significant overall improvement in the quality of writing at the content level, concluding that the concept of in-depth peer review is new to the students and they need more time, explicit instruction, and perhaps more language knowledge to produce results beyond the students’ basic surface writing features (mechanics, spelling, etc.). Similarly, Al Mazrooei (2009) found that writing as a process, although difficult at first for students who had been used to dictation of paragraphs as writing, improved their academic writing over time. She found that a popular pre-writing activity with her Emirati students was video clips about their ideas to help the students brainstorm—illustrating the importance of building experiences and schema. These studies highlight the need for explicit genre instruction, and building and connecting past experiences to new ideas.

As shown by the research mentioned in this chapter and other studies reviewed, research on L2 academic writing in English for higher education students in the Gulf region primarily focuses on specific language features, errors, assessment, or teaching
practices through a lens of descriptive statistics and pre/post-designed interventions. There is a noticeable gap in research on L1 Arabic students’ L2 academic writing through a systemic functional and descriptive applied linguistic perspective. This gap is unfortunate on two levels. First, writing is the productive skill, in either L1 or L2, that the students are primarily assessed on consistently and constantly with up to 90% of their grades in higher education subject area courses dependent on written projects and exams (many short answer and essay). Beyond the summative assessment, students are not often taught explicitly to connect various grammatical constructions and vocabulary to a certain text or genre that they have written—so instruction is of isolated grammar and vocabulary use without the instruction of expanded function and/or meaning within that context. This research aspires to contribute to the body of descriptive research of L2 academic writing to give further guidance to writing educators to assist the students in making those essential language connections.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday’s (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2007) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a model of viewing language and grammar not merely as a prescriptively right or wrong, but it is a descriptive model in which language and grammar can create socially-constructed meaning within a cultural context (Eggins, 2004). Schleppegrell (2007) writes that SFL researchers and educators use and teach their students language choices through metalanguage to create meaning with clear text organization and voice (p. 123). SFL, then, allows students access to the process of creating meaningful discourse and provides educators and students alike another way of viewing language within different contexts and literacies that can be used in real life applications. As Coffin (2010) implies, much like CALP and BICS (Cummins, 1984), SFL concepts, as applied in the classroom, have been implicitly taught as teachers may be
subconsciously aware of the difference in language constructions depending on purpose and context. However, SFL offers the methodology and metalanguage to bring that awareness to actual explicit teaching.

SFG (Systemic Functional Grammar), an approach to grammar within the SFL model, is not an approach in opposition to traditional grammar but another perspective with a focused purpose on meaning and discourse features. Derewianka and Jones (2010) suggest SFG is on a continuum between formal (traditional grammar) and functional grammar; SFG is concerned with and explains both form and function, often form as used within the function to construct meaning. Specifically, SFG within the SFL model is focused on the language choices used based on the subject matter under discussion (field), with whom one is communicating (tenor), and by what channel (mode, which can be spoken, written, visual, graphs, etc.), which combine to form the register. These registers are guided by overarching metafunctions or purposes that affect and overlap in every discourse (Derewianka & Jones, 2010). Directly related to the three areas that form the register, there are the three metafunctions in the overall SFL model that combine at all levels to create meaning within a text. Halliday and Hasan (1976) define a text as related clauses that are connected together or unified through cohesive devices. As shown in Figure 1, the field or subject matter is related to the ideational function, which is the author’s perspective on his/her surroundings; the mode or channel of communication is related to the textual function and includes cohesive devices and organizational patterns; and the tenor realizes the interpersonal function between the audience and author and characters within the text. These three metafunctions combine to form the register of the discourse within a social context and allow the educators and students to see beyond the surface of language (Haratyan, 2011). Different grammatical and vocabulary choices or lexico-grammatical language choices (Dare, 2010) are associated with each metafunction.
Initially, SFL can be seen as complex, but it presents an all-encompassing approach to using language appropriately for different situations. SFL theorists and researchers argue that this approach allows students and teachers to have access to various kinds of discourses (Gibbons, 2009; Hyland, 2007). Further, Derewianka and Jones (2010) write that the SFL model allows different entry points for students and teachers. If you consider tenor within register, for example, students begin to understand the text is written not just for themselves or their teacher exclusively but could also be written for a wider audience such as those with more knowledge of the topic, less knowledge of the topic, a formal
audience such as professionals in a field or an informal one such as peers. Language choices are often dependent on that audience. Similarly, the mode of the communication suggests language choices such as cohesive devices and organization within the path of communication, that is, written, spoken, aural, or visual.

**Brief Overview of Textual Metafunction**

The textual metafunction of SFL, which was used to analyze the texts in this study, is one layer that consistently overlaps with the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions to create meaningful language. The textual metafunction relates directly to the mode or channel of communication as was shown in Figure 1. In this research, the mode is hand-written, tertiary-level, academic texts.

According to Humphrey, Droga, and Feez (2012), textual elements “are like threads that tie together…a unified whole text…that an audience can comprehend and recognize as relevant and purposeful” (p. 93) and serve three primary functions:

1. Organizing the flow of information at text, sentence, and clause level (coherence).
2. Creating meaning and expanding concepts through nominalizations (changing concrete meanings to abstract concepts through nominalizing words—example: *to serve* (verb) nominalized to the more abstract concept of *service*).
3. Connecting text through various words or phrases (such as references, substitutions, transitions, etc.) to make it cohesive.

At the university in the study, the assessment areas are task achievement (content), coherence and unity (organization), language usage (vocabulary and English usage), and grammatical range and accuracy (parts of speech and types of sentences); however, the function of the different areas and language and grammar used within each area, i.e., verb groups, noun groups, connectives, cohesive devices used to create content and
organization, are not linked in the assessment to each other area or to a specific genre. Each area is evaluated in isolation for the most part. SFL, then, would introduce a varied kind of assessment and metalanguage of instruction that would allow students more access to constructing meaning and build a bridge across the traditional areas of writing, recognizing the constant overlapping of language functions.

SFL Relationship to Genre-Based L2 Writing

The genre-based approach, which is rooted in SFL and social constructivists Vygotsky’s and Bruner’s learning theories, is the teaching of explicit patterns of using language, spoken and written, and register within a social context to create meaning within each genre (Dare, 2010; Hyland, 2007). It is relevant to this research as the students in the study are taught academic writing within a genre-based pedagogy and the students’ writing will be analyzed based on the language features of the broader narrative genre, specifically telling their own story, an autobiographical recount.

Similar to SFL and its relationship to traditional linguistics, genre-based literacy should not be viewed as an opposition to traditional literacies but rather another perspective that adds more options and depth to the process. Hyland (2007) explains that genre, in relation to written literacy, “is based on the idea that members of a community usually have little difficulty in recognizing similarities in the texts they use frequently” which in turn helps learners use those familiar patterns to “perhaps write them [texts] relatively easily” (p. 149). Genre-based pedagogy, which began to be applied in higher education contexts in the 1990s (Rose, 2008), then promotes a perspective of teaching and learning writing that is more accessible for international and intercultural L2 learners.

Genre-based pedagogy gives the learner keys to the broad rhetorical styles in writing—this explicit instruction and consequent application allows even learners with limited writing background to competently use patterns in language and register within a
context (sometimes familiar, sometimes taught) in their writing. In other words as shown in Figure 2, within the genre, there is a situational context, the register, which is communicated through language to create meaning emphasizing the SFL connection (Chaisiri, 2010, p. 182). For example, to describe a process at the elemental or broader rhetorical level (Martin, 1992) requires different language (process verb groups, clauses, transitions) than informing about a happening or person (narrative or descriptive noun and being or sensing verb groups). Hyland (2007) writes that this understanding of language function and use within a social context at the elemental genre level allows the learner to transfer the patterns and language to the more focused macro level (using process patterns to write a step-by-step instruction, or descriptive patterns of an event for a feature article in magazine writing).

*Figure 2*. Relationship of Genre to Register and Language. Adapted from “From traditional grammar to functional grammar: Bridging the divide,” by B. Derewianka and P. Jones, 2010, in C. Coffin (Ed.), *Language support in EAL Context. Why Systemic Functional Linguistics?* (pp. 6-17). Special Issue of NALDIC Quarterly. Reading, UK: NALDIC.
In relation to genre-based pedagogy, Gibbons (2009) also suggests a genre-based assessment as each genre has its own organizational pattern, cohesive devices, vocabulary, and grammatical constructs. This concept of assessment by genre is not one implemented by the university in this research. The university instead assesses with a standard rubric for all genres. The idea of assessment by genre will be revisited later in Chapter Five.

For students who come from oral cultures, such as the Saudi students in this research, the genre-based approach to L2 writing can direct and organize the flow of ideas, which is not limiting creativity but rather encouraging meaningful writing. The researcher Slikas Barber found that learners from oral cultures often write according to their stream of consciousness (AMEP, 2006) rather than using a clear and identifiable organizational pattern. As illustrated by the literature and personal experience, this is quite common for Saudi students as well.

Further to the point of the importance of explicit instruction and understanding genre pedagogies, English genres in the classroom change continuously depending on level of education, purpose, and context. Saudi students in the public K-12 schools read about and read the modified work of prolific authors such as Dickens and Shakespeare in their English classes, their only classes in English. These authors write theatrical fiction and sonnets, so when these same students enter their majors at university, unless they are English language and literature majors, the genres change dramatically at all levels. Consequently, the learners cannot discern the new patterns without explicit instruction. Teachers face comments such as, “Dickens didn’t have a thesis” and “but I read ain’t in books in school.’ Literary literacy and academic literacy (dependent on discipline) now have to be differentiated by the L2 higher education teachers. In other words, in higher education, academic languages diverges into many forms in English. A genre approach would benefit students in further explaining these uses and forms of English.
At the university in this study, the genres chosen are based on the students’ needs according to perceived academic needs for their future, traditionally taught genres, curriculum and textbooks, and request from the major fields of study. Broad rhetorical patterns such as narrative, descriptive, expository/explanatory (process, compare/contrast, cause/effect), and argumentative are often taught in a sequence from least to most rigorous and academic (such as narrative or descriptive to argumentative) based on higher-order writing skills (Hyland, 2007). In most university preparatory programs in Saudi, after the preparatory year, the genre is then narrowed to the macro level in a subsequent communication class such as Professional and Technical Communication or Business Communication. At the macro level, the genres focus on the major and written work and products specifically needed for that major.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the gap in the literature particularly in the region focused on systemic analysis of L2 academic writing at the tertiary level for students with an L1 of Arabic. Most of the research on L2 academic writing in the region focuses on isolated systematic errors or specific language features that separate form and function. There is a notable gap in writing research through a systemic functional perspective where language is viewed as an integrated system of overlapping functions within a context. This research aims to lessen the gap and provide some description of emerging patterns, particularly of cohesion and coherence, in language use of L2 academic texts. This chapter further presented relevant research on L2 academic writing beginning from an international perspective that focused on studies using the SFL approach. The L2 academic writing research presented about the Gulf and Middle Eastern region focused on error analysis and interlingual and intralingual transfer and the overall need for improved pedagogical approaches in the region. The chapter concluded with an overview of the theoretical
paradigm of the research, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and genre-based pedagogy that has stemmed from the model and that will provide a foundation for the analysis in this research. Chapter Three will present the research methodology and design including background on the research site, participants, procedures, and ethics used in the study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This research analyzes what patterns of language use emerge to demonstrate cohesion in a Saudi higher education context for female preparatory year students from a descriptive analysis of students’ autobiographical narrative L2 writing. Chapter Two presented relevant research on L2 academic writing in higher education internationally and within the Gulf countries, emphasizing the need for further research and inquiry on academic writing. Further, the theory of systemic functional linguistics in relation to genre pedagogy in L2 writing was discussed. In this chapter, the research sites and participants are described. The overall theoretical paradigm of genre-based pedagogy and SFL’s textual metafunction as related to the research design and validation of the study and research ethics are also explained.

As I am not the participants’ instructor, I serve as an outsider with no emic or insider perspective on the actual participants or their class. Therefore, my observations on the students’ writing are objective without influence from teaching methodologies or other external factors. However, I have taught students at the institution in the research, and I am familiar with the curricula, settings, and perspectives on English education in their preparatory years, so there are positive insider dimensions to my observations. Further, I have taught writing either explicitly or implicitly (through other subject matter) to students with an L1 of Arabic for 11 years, eight years in higher education in Saudi Arabia.
Research Site

The research site in the study is the preparatory year program in a university in Saudi Arabia that, like many facilities in the Arabian Gulf, uses English as a medium of instruction except in the religion-based courses in the freshmen and sophomore years that are in Arabic (which is a requirement of the Ministry of Education). In Fall 2014, over half of the students enrolled were female (53%). Entry into the preparatory year English program in this university is based on placement exams--standardized test exams of IELTS (IELTS, n.d.) or TOEFL (TOEFL, n.d.) and institutional exams in English. The preparatory course offers English as well as other college preparation. There is no credit for the preparatory year in this university. Students progress through proficiency levels by semester. For example, an intermediate student in Fall will move to advanced level in Spring if he/she passes the intermediate level requirements. Class sizes range between 16-20 students per section and the passing grade is 70%.

Participants

The age range of the participants is 18-24 (the majority are 18-20) with an L1 of Arabic. Keeping in mind the gender segregation in Saudi Arabia, the participants are female; gender was not a variable under consideration in the research design. Further, to minimize external factors such as multiple languages that may affect findings, only those students’ work with an L1 of Arabic were analyzed.

The student participants were tested upon entry into the university (institutional exam following format and concepts used in standardized exams) and stratified by language proficiency level (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). For this research, only advanced level participants were included to provide a strong base of writing to analyze. At this institution, the entry points for all levels including advanced are either through internal progression, meaning passing through the beginner and intermediate levels, or
entering via placement. Advanced level students are defined as meeting one of the following requirements: IELTS score of 5.0/TOEFL iBT of 53+ or a passing rate on the institutional exam.

Preparatory English Program

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the university in the research uses genre-based writing in the preparatory year program based on rhetorical styles and function or purpose referred to by Hyland (2007) as elemental genres (descriptive, narrative, explanatory/expository, argumentative, etc.) and usually based on a universal theme presented by or related to the curriculum. The program instructs ten hours a week in reading/writing. All instructors at the university in the advanced level use the same curriculum, e-learning platform, analytic rubric, and graded weight of writing assignments, although instructors have the freedom to vary the topic and genre (within a predetermined set of genres) of writing assignments. While these factors along with teacher methodologies were out of the scope of this research, these variables may impact the analysis.

Theoretical Paradigm and Design

The design used for this research was an embedded mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014) primarily based on qualitative text analysis of writing samples from a university in Saudi Arabia. Creswell (2014) states in this approach “the core idea is that either quantitative or qualitative data is embedded within a larger design and….play a supportive role in the overall design” (p. 16). Brief snapshots of frequency and type of language choices were included to provide quantitative data that substantiated the descriptive analysis. Specifically, a descriptive text analysis of the writing samples was conducted based on the paradigm of systemic functional linguistics within a genre-based pedagogy focused on the textual metafunction (as explained in Chapter Two). The focus
was a descriptive analysis of the themes and patterns that emerged in the students’ writing in that particular genre—the genre assigned in the samples.

Data Collection and Analysis Preparation

For this study, writing samples were collected at the beginning of the Spring 2015 Semester, all identification markers of the participant (ID number and name) were removed and copies were made and sent to me via the Program Supervisor. Thirty texts from seven sections of writing in total were randomly collected; total possible population was around 140 advanced level female students. From there, the text samples were assigned participant numbers. Of the 30 texts collected, five essays were removed from the study; four texts were duplicated, and one text was incomplete.

I then began by identifying the genre from the assignment, which was given at the beginning of the semester in a 60-minute session to diagnose the students’ writing and was assigned an informal mark by the instructor (not counted in final grades). Based on three given prompts and features (discussed in Chapter Four), I concluded the genre for all prompts was a form of the traditional narrative, specifically an autobiographical recount mixing both factual and literary/story-telling elements (Humphrey et al., 2012).

Analysis Procedures

The samples were then described and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively to a lesser degree (for frequency and patterns of language used) within the textual metafunction specifically focusing on the features in Table 1. Each element in the SFL analysis was viewed separately initially (including word count, number of paragraphs, reference, etc.) and entered into an Excel spreadsheet for easy access to descriptive statistics. The texts were then analyzed focused on overall coherence, as suggested by Humphrey et al. (2012), both visual (paragraphing, breaks in text) and logical (flow of ideas shown through transitions such as essay and paragraph beginnings or ‘openers’ to
There are more features of this metafunction in producing both coherent and cohesive texts as mentioned in Chapter Two; however, due to the word count of the essays and the size of the project, the features were narrowed based on the most frequent patterns that emerged when analyzing the essays.

Table 1. Textual Metafunction Analysis Features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Questions</th>
<th>SFL Analysis Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What patterns emerge in the students’ writing to produce coherent texts?</td>
<td>Visual coherence (paragraphing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logical coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Openers to sentences/ connectors within text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme/rheme organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What patterns emerge in the students’ writing to produce cohesive texts?</td>
<td>Cohesive devices:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammatical Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substitution (Zero Substitution or Ellipsis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lexical Repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reiteration (synonyms, classifications)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from “Grammar and meaning,” by S. Humphrey et al., 2012, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association, and “Beyond rubrics: Using functional language*

**Coherence Analysis**

The analysis of coherence, based on the work and explanation by Humphrey et al. (2012), focused on visual and logical coherence patterns. To analyze visual coherence, as the texts had no graphics and were handwritten in class, the analysis involved actual written paragraphs. Paragraphs, as written by the participants including indentation and/or line breaks, for each essay were counted and re-counted and entered in the Excel spreadsheet. Then each essay was read for logical paragraphing—that is whether visual paragraphing actually represented the logical flow of the text as shown through transition words and topic sentences. During this part of the analysis, the organizational patterns (chronological, topical, etc.) became of interest due to the differences between essays and were included in the analysis. The essays were then re-read looking at elements and patterns of theme/rheme and patterns that emerged.

**Cohesion Analysis**

The analysis of cohesion, based on Humphrey et al. (2012) and the patterns of cohesive ‘tie’ (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), looked at patterns of grammatical cohesion (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction) and lexical cohesion (repetition, reiteration, synonyms, collocations, etc.) that emerged. This analysis was done initially by going through each text line by line and qualitatively identifying the cohesive device and coding it with short-hand that I could identify later (for example, cc=coordinating conjunction; ref=reference, etc.). Then, each device was quantified and a brief summary was written at the end of each essay.

After the coherence and cohesion analysis, basics of the analysis and emerging patterns such as word count, paragraph count, reference count, etc. were entered on the
spreadsheet with averages calculated. Further, ten of the initially analyzed texts were given to a colleague (as mentioned in the next section) with a list of my reference codes so she could review and replicate the analysis.

Validation and Triangulation of the Findings

For consideration of qualitative validity, the researcher bias and perspective has been explained in Chapter One and further elaborated upon in this chapter. Although I am part of the culture and have knowledge of the university in this research, I have no connection to or control over the instructors or participants’ work. For further confirmation of the results (Creswell, 2013), I have negotiated that the students’ samples are given to me with all identifiers removed and are within the same level to provide some consistency in language use by proficiency. A certified instructor, who has over a decade of experience in teaching EFL to students with an L1 of Arabic and who is highly familiar with cohesion and unity, reviewed my analysis of 40% (10) of the texts to provide consistency and a form of triangulation of results (Creswell, 2013). From her analysis feedback, which found more cohesive devices than my initial analysis, particularly repetition, I again reviewed all of the 15 remaining texts to ensure accuracy. Finally, to make the results of the relatively small sample perhaps more transferable and minimize the variable of teaching strategies, the essays were collected from seven different instructors.

Research Ethics

Measures to protect the participants and minimize any harmful or negative consequences were implemented throughout the research process. Oral followed by written permission from the research site supervisor was obtained at the onset of the research project once initial topic approval was granted from my primary advisor. Once the Human Subjects Review Committee had approved my proposal, the research site supervisor began collecting the essays over a two-week period during which time all participant identifiers
were removed. Informed consent was obtained during this period via the participants’ instructors and supervisor through discussion of the research project and the signed consent form in Arabic and English (see Appendix A). The anonymous essays were then passed to me, the researcher. I had no further contact with the participants.

Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology used including research paradigm, design, site, overview of participants, data collection procedures, analysis preparation, and finally the research ethics that were implemented. Chapter Four will discuss the descriptive analysis of the students’ academic writing using the textual metafunction to investigate students’ language patterns to create coherent and cohesive texts.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research studies what descriptive patterns emerge from Saudi female university students’ L2 autobiographical academic writing using the textual metafunction of SFL focusing on language and devices to construct cohesive and coherent texts.

Chapter Two presented relevant research on L2 academic writing in higher education internationally and within the Gulf countries emphasizing the need for further research and inquiry into academic writing. Further, the theory of systemic functional linguistics, highlighting the textual metafunction, in relation to genre pedagogy in L2 writing was discussed. In Chapter Three, the research site, participants, overall theoretical paradigm and SFL’s textual metafunction as related to the research design and validation of the study and research ethics are also explained. In this chapter, the specific genre used in the study will be briefly explained and patterns of coherence and cohesion found in the texts will be presented and described.

Autobiographical Recount Genre

The participants in this study responded to one of the three prompts which I identified as autobiographical recount prompts according to the varying genre descriptions of Humphrey et al. (2012). The autobiographical recount genre, which “records and evaluates events in a person’s life” (p. 132), is related to both narrative and factual recount genres and is used in several disciplines including language instruction.

It should be noted that neither the essay prompts nor the directions explicitly defined the genre or asked the students to tell a story, narrate, or recount in their essay.
The directions were simply to “choose one of the topics and write a 3-4 paragraph essay.
Give your essay a title.”

1. The happiest day or memory of my life so far
2. The hardest thing I ever had to do
3. My most embarrassing experience

Adapted from Humphrey et al. (2012, p. 132), the key features, including textual (shaded), inherent in an autobiographical recount are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Features of an Autobiographical Recount Writing.

| Language for expressing ideas | • Action expressed in the past tense
|                             | • Particular human and non-human participants (nouns and pronouns)
|                             | • Circumstances and dependent clauses to express detail
| Language of interaction      | • Appreciation and judgment to evaluate impact of events and behaviors of people
| Language to connect ideas and create cohesive texts (textual metafunction) | • Sentences including dependent clauses of time (complex or compound-complex)
|                             | • Text connectives to sequence events
|                             | • References to time in theme position (initial position)
|                             | • Lexical cohesion of repetition, synonyms, and collocations

*Note.* Adapted from “Grammar and meaning” [Adobe Digital Edition], by S. Humphrey et al., 2012, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association.
Patterns of Coherence

As mentioned in Chapter Two, when discussing the textual features of any text, coherence and cohesion are often mentioned as necessary criteria (CIC & CCLB, 2012). The Canadian Language Benchmarks (2012) define coherence as “the logical connectedness of ideas, arguments and exchanges to make the purpose and intended meaning of the discourse clear to the audience and participants” (p. 231). With that in mind, the essays were analyzed and described below initially by characteristics of visual and logical coherence.

Visual Coherence

Humphrey et al. (2012) discuss visual imagery as placement of images, white space, and overall composition of the images and its importance to coherence. In academic, written texts, paragraphing, breaks between paragraphs in the form of indentation or leaving a space between lines, is a form of visual coherence signaling to the reader that the text is moving forward onto the next idea, event, reason, or step in the procedure depending upon the genre. As mentioned in the directions, the students were asked to write a 3-4 paragraph essay—the genre or basic elements of each paragraph were not mentioned in this in-class diagnostic assignment. The data illustrates that the participants wrote an average number of three paragraphs in the texts with only six students writing less than the required number.

Although the students at the advanced level showed understanding of paragraphing for the most part, the visual breaks of the texts were not always sufficient or logical. This is where visual and logical coherence or text unity overlap. The participants’ typical three-paragraph essay began with an introduction to the event (embarrassing experience, happiest day, or hardest thing) in the first paragraph, the entire chronology of the event in
the second paragraph with no breaks (which reflects some understanding of the autobiographical recount genre), and a summary of the event in the third paragraph with a reason of why the event was chosen or a recommendation about the event.

Fewer than half of the texts (11) were divided further and of those texts, only five texts were paragraphed actually according to logical divisions of reasons for the event being the happiest memory, chronology, topics of the event, etc. with more than four supporting details. Four of the 11 texts were logically paragraphed but had little support (2-3 simple/short sentences only), and two of the remaining texts were paragraphed further but the reasons for the new paragraph were not apparent. In other words, the participants understood paragraphing and its meaning within constructing a text visually, but only five of the 25 texts were paragraphed accurately according to the opening paragraph.

Logical Coherence

Humphrey et al. (2012) write that “the coherence of more complex texts relies on devices that signal text structure and guide readers, for example overviews, initial and concluding paragraphs and topic sentences, indexes or site maps or breadcrumb trails for online texts” (p. 13). The Canadian Language Benchmarks for ESL adults (CIC & CCLB, 2012) similarly discusses the importance of coherence in producing logical texts at the advanced level (p. 16). Overviews are an overall preview or map of the text often called a thesis, or text opener as referred to by Humphrey et al. (2012), which state the predicted flow or structure of the essay while the topic sentences or paragraph openers move the written piece along and signal the next step or reason in the text all following the initial preview or thesis; this is the typical organizational structure in a traditional essay such as a descriptive or expository. In a narrative piece, there may or may not be a text opener and topic sentence depending upon the exact purpose as a narrative organizational pattern is not necessarily ‘fixed’ (Humphrey et al., 2012). Although the autobiographical recount is
not the same as the narrative genre--it is focused on factual chronicling, according to Humphrey et al., it does have narrative features such as use of *first person* and past tense to tell the events and orientation of the setting/context. However, the participants, as per the advanced level of the prep program, are taught to write essays that include text and paragraph openers across the writing curriculum.

In the analysis, 17 of the 25 texts (68%) had an identifiable thesis or text opener. The remaining had an obvious topic but no text direction to preview the text in the opening paragraph. Interestingly, only 9 of those 17 texts with a clear text opener had topic sentences for each subsequent paragraph (including conclusion). In total, just over half, or 59% of total paragraphs written in this sample had a topic sentence or clear paragraph opener. In other words, two-thirds (68%) of participants had the concept and understanding of how to write a text opener, but just one third knew how to continue and unify the rest of the essay.

Figure 3 shows a sample of logical coherence that does not have the appropriate visual coherence. A participant’s text visually, upon initial glance, appears to be a three-paragraph essay, but, upon reading, the essay is actually intended to be four paragraphs. Although the paragraphing is insufficient, the participant uses a topic sentence to show movement to the next idea and spacing after the last word of the introduction to illustrate logical coherence.

Relating to overall coherence is the structure of the essay or text, which is previewed in the text opener in academic texts. As is necessary in genre-based pedagogy, students are given a structure or organization to follow along with the key features as mentioned in Table 2. For an autobiographical recount, the following organizational pattern is recommended by Humphrey et al. (2012); however, neither this pattern nor any other was presented to the participants in the directions.
1. Orientation – sets a context for understanding the events that follow;

2. Record of events – recounted in chronological order;

3. Re-orientation (for factual recount) – resetting events back in time; and,

4. Judgment/significance (for autobiographical and biographical recount) – evaluates the significance of the person or the event. (p. 132)

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**Figure 3.** Sample of text illustrating coherence with paragraph openers.

As mentioned in the previous section on visual coherence, 11 texts were divided into four main paragraphs with five of those texts written with logical divisions. But, according to the structure recommended for the genre (Humphrey et al., 2012), three of 25 followed the structure of an autobiographical recount. Fourteen of the texts followed the structure to some degree with the re-orientation and the judgment combined in the final sentences or the concluding paragraph of the essay. A recount can be structured in different ways depending on the instructor, but it was noticeable that the participants did not know or have a structure to guide this genre of writing. An interesting occurrence though was with eight of the essays which divided the ideas coherently and logically but using a
different structure, a topical organizational pattern, which divided the event not by
chronology but by subtopics, as shown in the following text openers.

1. In this essay, I will talk about my happiest memory in tow main point: how my friends
surprising me and the cake shape.

2. In this essay, I’m going to talk about the clothes and the food.

3. This is the story about my feelings and what happened in that remarkable weekend.

Therefore, only three of the students knew or by chance wrote within the genre’s
structural pattern while 14 followed the recommended organizational pattern to a lesser
degree and without adequate paragraphing. Eight of the participants seemingly were quite
aware of the importance of structure and used a text opener but followed a completely
different organizational pattern, highlighting the importance of understanding genre to
writing coherent academic essays.

Sentence Openers and In-Text Connectors

At the next level of text, the sentence level, there is a close relationship between
sentence openers (how sentences begin) and in-text connectors, which are in-text cohesion
devices to tie one part of the text to another. As per Humphrey et al.’s (2012) recount
genre textual features (Table 2), text connectives of time (next, second, etc.) and adverbial
clauses of time (before we arrived…, in two days…) are common in the marked theme or
initial position for this genre to connect text through time markers. A marked theme (p.
101), according to the researchers, refers to an uncommon way to open a sentence in the
language; in English, sentences are usually opened with noun groups in the theme (initial)
position so opening with another feature is considered uncommon. For example, opening a
sentence with “After we go to the grocery store,” is starting a sentence with an adverbial of
time or a circumstance, a marked theme.
In the essays analyzed, there was an average of only three adverbials of time in each text and only one in the marked theme position on average per essay. In fact, three essays did not even use features of time, adverbials or connectors, in their writing and most sentences began with nouns or noun groups. Therefore, the textual feature of connecting the text through expressions of time at the sentence-initial position was not used effectively by the students.

Further, there was only an average of ten in-text connectors used in each essay. In-text connectors for this project refers to words or phrases that tie the text intra- and intersententially within paragraphs such as coordinating conjunctions, subordinators, and adverbial clauses. While adverbial marked phrases are often the most common in-text connector in this genre, in the participant essays, the highest number of connectors, 40%, were coordinating conjunctions (*and, but* used most frequently). The most common adverbial clause was of the clause of time (30% of all in-text connectors used). Adverbial clauses or phrases of addition and subordinators within sentences (*because* and *while* were the most frequent) were the majority of the remaining third of in-text connectors.

**Theme/Rheme**

Theme (initial position, ‘old’ information) and rheme (new information) are important concepts within the textual metafunction at the clausal level. Haratyan (2011) wrote that in theme/rheme “the information flows like a wave in a sentence from thematic top to thematic bottom… Theme slides toward Rheme and Given information toward New to reveal the location of information prominence” (p. 263). In practical terms, in the sentences, “The Earth revolves around the Sun. It takes 365 days to do so,” *the Earth* is the theme (the sentence-initial participant, process or circumstance) and *revolves around the Sun* is the new information in the context or the rheme in the first sentence and *it* is the Theme in the second sentence. As mentioned previously and as shown in Table 2, an
autobiographical recount writing often has a marked theme emphasis or pattern with time references or clauses referred to as a circumstance (Humphrey et al., 2012), but that was not prevalent in the participants’ essays.

Humphrey et al. (2012, p. 102) refer to and explain three common theme/rheme patterns, namely linear, chronological, and zigzag as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Common Theme/Rheme Patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Rheme</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linear:</td>
<td>Sara Al Mousa</td>
<td>is a trained psychologist.</td>
<td>Introduce a situation/setting/participant;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct theme repetition</td>
<td>She</td>
<td></td>
<td>factual; participant or theme is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronological:</td>
<td>Marked Theme:</td>
<td></td>
<td>When time is important; such as biography, process, historical, or recount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To show time movement</td>
<td>When he was five years old,</td>
<td>lived with his parents in Singapore.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zigzag:</td>
<td>Pejoration</td>
<td>is the process of a word assuming a negative connotation.</td>
<td>When explanation of new information is important and needs to be linked with previous information; expository and descriptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To inform/explain previous information</td>
<td>This process</td>
<td>has occurred to many words throughout time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the patterns mentioned in Table 3, the students’ essays moved in and out of the patterns, which is somewhat appropriate for the different stages of the text. However, the participants moved between the patterns with no apparent awareness of which ones to use when or for what purpose. For example, setting up the context (the introduction) often had a zigzag and, although less common, linear and chronological pattern. Table 4 shows a typical participant introduction and the Theme/Rheme patterns used.

Table 4. Theme/Rheme Patterns in Introduction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Rheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial clause</td>
<td>Everyone in this world</td>
<td>had a happiest memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zigzag</td>
<td>My happiest memory</td>
<td>is I visited Manchester with my friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronological</td>
<td>Since I was a child,* I</td>
<td>dream to visit UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronological</td>
<td>and last summer* I</td>
<td>did it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates marked theme before the participant theme.

Table 5 shows a typical pattern of a body paragraph of the participants who used a chronological (not topical) pattern of recounting their memory overall but did not use a chronological theme/rheme pattern at the clausal level consistently. As illustrated in the table, even when the storyline moves chronologically, the writing patterns often move linearly. This was consistent in the students’ work, which shows an apparent unfamiliarity of the theme/rheme concept and a lack of awareness, perhaps even ability or confidence, to use more complex and varied writing patterns.
Table 5. Theme/Rheme Patterns in Body Paragraph.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Rheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial clause</td>
<td>Back then, in 2004, when I was nine years old, my dad</td>
<td>called me and my one year younger brother on the phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronological</td>
<td>when I was nine years old*, my dad (participant theme)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>and he</td>
<td>told us that my mom is in the hospital,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zigzag</td>
<td>and we</td>
<td>got a new brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>because I</td>
<td>didn’t believe him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>didn’t know that my mom was pregnant in first place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-plural</td>
<td>however we</td>
<td>got extremely happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronological</td>
<td>After * we</td>
<td>saw him,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zigzag</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>was so tiny and adorable,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>named him Reda.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates marked theme before the participant theme.

Patterns of Cohesion

As mentioned briefly in Chapter Two, Halliday and Hasan (1976) explain cohesion as “relations of meaning that exist within a text, and that define it as a text…where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another” (p. 4). The authors discuss five types of cohesive devices, referred to by Halliday and Hasan as cohesive ties, four of which are grammatical: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, as well as lexical cohesion, which consists of repetition, reiteration, synonyms, collocations, etc. In this research, both grammatical and lexical cohesive devices emerged
from the analysis of the students’ autobiographical writing with certain devices such as reference and substitution occurring more often than others. Table 6 illustrates the frequency of grammatical devices of reference and substitution. Substitution and ellipsis, also referred to as zero substitution, are combined as the obvious difference or separation of the two was not evident in the students’ usage.

Table 6. Frequent grammatical cohesive devices in students’ L2 writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>Grammatical Cohesion Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>241</td>
<td>56</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>163</td>
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</tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4,538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Substitution/Ellipsis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>181.52</td>
<td>34.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* As mentioned in Chapter Three, five essays were removed from the analysis as the texts were either duplicated or incomplete.
Reference

Reference words help the text connect through various ways of referring within a text, within culturally shared information, and from the externally known context and appear in the form of pronouns, demonstratives, comparatives, and other text references (Haratyan, 2011). Reference words then can refer back to something (anaphoric) or ahead to something (cataphoric). Anaphoric reference was by far the most frequently used cohesive device by the participants. Pronouns, particularly first person singular and plural I, me, my, we, our, us, expected in an autobiographical recount, and the definite article the were the most used reference markers. As shown by the data in Table 5, the range was from 17-58 markers with the average of approximately 35 references per essay. The examples below show the high frequency of referencing.

4. We gives our parent gift to thank them about the hard feelings and hard time how they reach us this amazing day in our lifes.

5. I was sitting in my bedroom then my sister call me come down. I cam down it was no lights then they turn on the lights I was so surprising because I saw all my friends.

Notably, 13 of the 25 participants used an exophoric reference, a reference that relies on shared meaning out of the text (Azzouz, 2009), to begin their essays—often called a hook or attention getter by writing instructors, that was markedly similar. These essays, over half, began with “we all,” “everyone,” “everybody,” “a lot of people,” or “every girl has many happy memories” or a variation of this pattern. This reference suggests that the participants understood the concept of a hook that presents a generalization common to most readers, which would then be narrowed into the text opener or thesis.
Substitution and Ellipsis (Zero Substitution)

Substitution occurs when a word is substituted for part of a clause or zero substitution, ellipsis, is when assumed words are removed altogether. Substitution is needed as cohesive tie to keep the text from becoming redundant, repeating the obvious or making the text more concise. For example, in the question, ‘do you like the blue shirt or the purple one,’ *one* is used to substitute for *shirt*.

The most frequently used substitution device by the participants, although used much less frequently than referencing, was nominal ellipsis as opposed to verbal or clausal substitution or ellipsis (Humphrey et al., 2012). The most common nominal substitute was ‘one’ and the most frequent ellipsis occurred within a simple or compound sentence with the removal of the subject after the coordinating conjunction. As shown by the data in Table 6, the range was from 0-11 substitution instances with the average of approximately 2.7 per essay. This cohesive device requires a higher level of grammatical cohesion knowledge and lexical resource than referencing. The examples below show substitution and ellipsis.

6. *...even though I felt a scary in the beginning and [ellipsis] was about to cancel it.*

7. *...I can’t really tell it was a happy day or sad [ellipsis]...*

8. *I grow up enough and [incorrect ellipsis] so excited to go to college.*

9. *We ordered some sandwiches and soft drinks. Not a healthy choice but so [substitution] is waking up at 1:00 am.*

The consistent pattern of nominal ellipsis after one of the coordinating conjunctions, most often ‘and’ which appeared in every text as a conjunction in a compound sentence, suggests that removing or even substituting the second subject is an easier method of zero substitution for the participants. It is also notable that the essay with the highest word count had the highest instances of substitution (11).
Table 7. Frequent lexical cohesive devices in students’ L2 writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>Lexical Cohesion Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>315</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>181.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Repetition

Repetition, mentioned as a lexical cohesion feature of autobiographical recount writing in Table 2, was frequently found in the participants’ essays. Table 7 illustrates that the average essay had 11 instances of repetition, and the overall range of usage, 2-25, demonstrated the wide range of students’ use of this lexical feature.

Noticeably, the students who used repetition with higher frequency often clustered the repeated words within a paragraph as shown in the examples below. Further, to
differentiate or show emphasis, a reference marker such as a pronoun or definite article was used before the repeated word or phrase. In example 10, one paragraph has the word *name* repeated five times, once as the verb form. Similarly, example 11, the word *farm* is repeated four times and *dates* and the construction *there were* each twice.

10. First let me tell you a small story happened before my *brother* came. My other *brothers* and I decide to named him Yazeed but my mom ignored the *name* she said that she didn’t love the *name* and she want Nawaf to be the *name* of our *brother*. After two hours of thinking finally we agreed with the *name*.

11. We went to discover the *farm* actually, *there were* big changes we didn’t visit the *farm* for a long time. *There were* palms which contain a lot of delicious *dates* also there were a small lake it has colourful fish. In addition, the imported flowers are fell the *farm*. We liking these adding to the *farm* also we took a lot of pictures. After that we sat on the floor enjoying the fresh air, eating *dates* and sweets.

While repetition is considered a lexical cohesive feature of autobiographical recount writing, the examples show, through the close placement of the repeated words, that the students use this device too frequently, to the point of redundancy. This overuse suggests that more complex lexical features are too difficult or not produced automatically in the students’ writing.

**Reiteration**

Reiteration or the stating of words/phrases in a similar manner is defined by Haratyan (2011) as “a lexical item [that] directly or indirectly occurs through application of synonym, antonym, metonym, or hyponym or a super-ordinate and collocation where pair of same event or environment lexical items co-occur or found together within the text” (p. 264). As shown in Table 7, reiteration appeared in the essays on an average of 3.28 times with a range of 1-10 instances in the texts. Antonyms and hyponyms (also called
classifications) occurred on average of one-two times per text. In example 12, the participant used a synonym for mother and father rather than the super-ordinate parent, which was a common lexical cohesion theme in the essays along with repetition. Also, the common grammatical feature of pronouns is used extensively in this example.

12. It was about 5 years ago my mother and father decided to separate and they gave me a week to choose between living with my mom or dad. It was so hard for me to choose between them.

13. Manchester was an amazing trip in my life until now. Also, there are a lot of different places you can visit there such as, malls, restaurants, and parks. Manchester is really unforgettable trip. I hope to visited next summer.

Example 13 illustrates several examples of lexical cohesive devices such as repetition, synonym (amazing, unforgettable) and sub-categorizing places to visit. It also has two connectives of time (until now, next summer).

Along with repetition and synonyms, collocations are mentioned by Humphrey et al. (2012) as common lexical features of cohesion for an autobiographical recount text. However, in the essays studied, other than the normal phrasal verbs that an intermediate-advanced proficiency learner would be expected to know, there were few unique collocations used.

Summary

Chapter Four discussed the descriptive analysis of the students’ autobiographical academic writing using the textual metafunction to investigate students’ language patterns to create coherent and cohesive texts. The findings, discussed further in Chapter Five, illustrated that while the written texts were comprehensible and had some elements of coherence and cohesion, several basics of academic writing that would have constructed a more meaningful and coherent text were missing. The analysis also suggests that students
at the advanced proficiency level at this university could benefit substantially from explicit SFL and genre-based instruction. Chapter Five will summarize the study and connect this analysis to pedagogical implications. Further, study limitations and recommendations for future research will be discussed.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This research examines what descriptive patterns emerge from Saudi female university students’ L2 autobiographical academic writing using the textual metafunction of SFL focusing on language and devices to construct cohesive and coherent texts.

Chapter Two presented relevant research on L2 academic writing in higher education internationally and within the Gulf countries emphasizing the need for further research and inquiry on academic writing. Further, the theory of systemic functional linguistics, highlighting the textual metafunction, in relation to genre pedagogy in L2 writing was discussed. In Chapter Three, the research site, participants, overall theoretical paradigm and SFL’s textual metafunction as related to the research design and validation of the study and research ethics are also explained. Chapter Four defined the specific genre used in the study and presented the descriptive results and discussion of the patterns of cohesion and coherence found in the texts. This chapter will conclude the study with a brief summary of results and pedagogical implications for EFL writing teachers, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Brief Summary of Findings

The findings show that the 25 written texts analyzed for this study illustrated some elements of coherence and cohesion. However, similar to the findings of the international and regional studies reviewed in Chapter Two, substantial features of academic writing related to the textual metafunction were missing, inappropriate, or showed an absence of language complexity. As Hinkel (2005) and Storch’s (2009) research studies suggest, the
participants’ writing in general and particularly related to coherence and cohesion, was limited and, at times, over-simplified, shown through the lack of accurate paragraphing, clear understanding of the genre (patterns to use), and overuse of basic cohesive devices, specifically pronouns for referencing and repetition.

Only three of the 25 participants had a clear view of how to organize the autobiographical recount, 14 had a partial concept of this genre, and eight participants used a completely different organizational structure indicating that using this genre was not known or only partially known to these participants. Similar to Tshotsho’s (2014) findings with South African students, most of these advanced students could generally use the register required for this academic writing, but one-third could not seemingly discern the appropriate organizational pattern. As suggested by Khuweilah and Alshoumali (2000) and Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007), explicitly taught text differences or genre instruction would help literacy in the L1 and L2 and academic writing process.

Of the sentence openers, in-text connectors, and theme/rheme coherence at the clausal level, participants used the chronological clause, recommended for the genre, in the marked theme position (Humphrey et al., 2012) or within text 30% of the time. Although the autobiographical recount genre organizational structure is based highly on chronology, Humphrey et al. also mentioned the overall importance of varied clausal constructions for dynamic and fluid writing. Similar to the Al-Yaari et al. (2013) findings, 40% of in-text connectors were conjunctions and and but.

The overuse of basic cohesive devices, grammatically through references using pronouns and lexically through repetition, was in contrast to Crossley and McNamara’s (2010) study that discusses the reverse cohesion effect (fewer cohesive devices) for advanced proficiency students. Further, the lack of reiteration and high-level collocations
illustrated a limited range of vocabulary. Participants, on average, used ellipsis, substitution and reiteration, more complex devices, sparingly.

The factors that affected the results can only be assumed or hypothesized; however, the findings about the textual function of these participants’ writing can lead to several realistic implications for EFL writing educators at the higher education level.

Limitations of the Study

The study’s main limitations are sample size, proficiency level and geographic diversity within Saudi, and a more detailed SFL analysis. Sample size is the most prominent limitation as 25 texts, while enough to have conclusions and implications, are not enough to make the findings generalizable to the wider EFL population. Including beginner and intermediate proficiency levels in the study and comparing the levels in universities across the Kingdom would provide more comprehensive results that would reflect the larger Saudi population. Finally, a more in-depth analysis using SFL including both the experiential and interpersonal metafunctions would expand the findings and further benefit writing educators.

Implications for EFL Writing Educators

This study's findings, although based on a relatively small sample of written work, provide several possible implications for the textual aspect of L2 academic writing that can support the educator and the students’ goal of writing meaningful text (Paiva & Lima, 2011):

Genre Instruction in Writing

The findings suggest that students had not been taught this particular genre or organizational style or were not sure when to use it in their writing. Having stated this, one narrative or autobiographical recount structure is not necessarily preferable over another, but it was clear from the findings that there was no clear organizational structure for at
least 30% of the participants and another 50% seemed somewhat unsure of the appropriate structure. Genre instruction of the organizational structures at the elemental level (Hyland, 2007) and where necessary at the more specific or macro writing level would have improved these students' organizational structure and, therefore, construction of meaningful text.

**Visual Coherence**

This kind of coherence, often minimized as obvious at the tertiary level, was not apparent to the participants in this study. As shown by the texts, six participants wrote fewer than three clear paragraphs, as requested in the directions of the assignment, and less than half, or 11, wrote four paragraphs or more, but four of those texts were very brief (2-3 sentences only). Only five of 25 essays were actually paragraphed clearly and appropriately according to the thesis. To create meaningful texts, sufficient and appropriate paragraphing and the supporting details expected within those paragraphs are essential to guide both the writer and audience through the piece visually and consequently logically.

**Logical Coherence or Unity**

Considering that the students have been taught to include text and paragraph openers in all genres, moving through the text with a thesis (text opener) and topic sentences (paragraph openers) that are unified with the thesis was apparent in nine of the 25 texts written. However, as stated in Chapter Four, in an autobiographical recount, text and paragraph openers are not necessarily as consistent or appropriate as in other genres. What is clear, though, is that the participants in the typical essay wrote an introduction with text opener, all events (for those who wrote with a chronological pattern) in one paragraph, and then a conclusion with a final thought, feeling or recommendation showing an understanding of overall unity but a lack of development of how to fully organize and extend such an essay. Relating again to genre instruction, eight essays moved through the
text with a topical rather than chronological organizational pattern suggesting that the participants lacked awareness of appropriate ways to unify their essays. Aside from instruction to scaffold the appropriate genre pattern, writing unified essays with topic sentences or transitions within related paragraphs that link to the text opener or main idea is again essential for creating meaningful texts.

**Sentence Openers, In-Text Connectors and Clausal Level Theme/Rheme**

These textual elements move the writings from the paragraph level to the sentence and clausal level. From the study, the participants used only an average of only ten in-text connectors, intra- and inter-sententially, within their essay, nearly half of which were basic conjunctions. Further, there was an average of only one marked chronological sentence opener per essay, which are usually the mainstay sentence opener in this sort of essay and of the in-text connectors, only 30% were chronological. The clausal structure was a mix of various patterns. The participants showed a linear pattern most often throughout the body of their essays, and it was apparent that theme/rheme in an explicit sense was unknown by the participants. While variation is imperative to create interesting and meaningful text and there is no 'formula' for exact kinds of openers and connectors, the chronological pattern for this genre is the most appropriate for English language learners, and the fact that 40% of overall connectors used were coordinating conjunctions implies the participants did not have more complex connectors in their language resource. Explicit teaching of openers, connectors, and theme/rheme patterns will again promote construction of a meaningful text and may enhance the learner's confidence to experiment with language use.

**Cohesion**

The grammatical and lexical devices used by the participants demonstrated a similar pattern to the other textual features discussed—a lack of varied and complex usage.
Pronouns as references and repetition were the most commonly used grammatical and lexical devices to the point of overuse, while substitution and ellipsis and reiteration, requiring a more sophisticated lexico-grammatical resource (Dare, 2010), were used considerably less. Several (13) participants used an exophoric reference to begin their essay, the hook, which nearly parallels the use of theses or text openers (17 participants). Thus, well-constructed opening ideas and paragraphs were illustrated throughout the texts; however, cohesion and coherence throughout the rest of the essay was not as apparent.

While instructional methodologies are out of the scope of this research, these findings do strongly suggest a foundation from which to work and that explicit teaching, as that of the hook and thesis, provides important scaffolding of the students' writing. Substitution, ellipsis, more complex referencing, reiteration, and collocation work would further encourage more meaningful text, both grammatically and lexically, not only for this genre but for any kind of writing the students would encounter.

Throughout the literature review and research process, it was evident that primarily discrete elements of L2 writing, particularly for the region, have been researched, considered and contrasted in previous studies—a focus on the parts rather than the sum of the parts, the whole. Therefore, the most notable conclusion really is that the participants did not know how, in many cases, to construct highly meaningful text in several elements of cohesion and coherence which affected the work overall and each of the coinciding functions. Via SFL or any other applicable model, creating meaningful text within a context that serves a function is the ultimate goal of any written work.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further applied research specific to this L2 population on how to write meaningful texts is highly recommended. As mentioned in the study’s limitations, research on a wider sample, including both men and women and the proficiency levels of beginner,
intermediate, and advanced, and across universities would provide a generalizable foundation of data from which researchers can study and educators can use to enhance writing instruction in the Kingdom. It is also recommended that future research include analysis using the three metafunctions working synergistically to create meaningful text, not just the textual metafunction. An expanded view of the language as a whole would provide further detailed and valid conclusions.

**Dissemination of Results**

Currently, my position at a university in Saudi Arabia is defined as a *faculty trainer* in an academic development department, which has as its sole purpose enhancing the learning and teaching at the university. My participants are instructors/professors who instruct in English. Considering the role I have at the institution and based on my aim to improve L2 academic writing at the tertiary level, results can be shared primarily in two ways: a discussion to heighten awareness of SFL, and real application in the classroom through SFL and genre-based teaching and assessment strategies.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, regional studies and awareness of SFL is limited in the ESL/EFL learning and teaching community here. Awareness through discussion and practical and comparative presentations based on theoretical underpinnings would open a discussion and therefore a door to the SFL paradigm; this is a necessary first step. Showing the participants the writing samples from this study through the traditional isolated language features as compared to viewing the texts in a more integrated manner with overlapping functions and genre-based pedagogy will facilitate this discussion. Further, this study’s implications along with similar studies could be shared and discussed with English-medium content and language instructors for heightened awareness and clarity of SFL as a practical approach.
Beyond the basic discussion level, teaching and assessment strategies that bring SFL and genre instruction to the classroom in authentic ways both in learning and teaching and assessment is perhaps the best way to disseminate results that will actually aid students in becoming better writers. Workshops and even suggesting international experts in SFL and genre-based writing to present these workshops (international presenters are brought in regularly in the region directly to universities and at regional conferences) is one realistic way.

A second and more permanent way to bring results to the classroom is working with the English language departments/preparatory programs and instructors in developing a more integrated language program that scaffolds how language is created within the different functions and across genres and areas of literacy. As in Rose, Lui-Chivizhe, McKnight, and Smith’s (2003) article about an effective literacy program based on scaffolding reading and writing for indigenous adults returning to higher education in Australia, many Saudi and Gulf region language and preparatory programs use reading as a foundation of writing effective texts. The reading and writing modes are often linked in classes in language programs, both through textbooks and time. Often, though, in many programs, the texts and articles are general and do not focus, scaffold, or even mention genre or strategies to approach various genres and create strong writing. Developing a language program that focuses on teaching strategies to highlight, annotate, and respond to readings that reflect the students’ field of study, at least in the latter part of the program, and on the academic language used, across the metafunctions and genres, will improve literacy in both reading and writing and give students a foundation to work from. From the readings, students begin to see the writings essential for their fields of study at the elemental and macro levels (Martin, 1992) while gaining content knowledge and learning how to write pieces that are meaningful for their future. It also begins the process of
shifting instructional focus from language in isolation (content, grammar, organization, etc.) and the pervasive assessment focus of error counting to writing and overall literacy focused on quality of language.

Reflections on the Study

This study on L2 academic writing using an SFL lens has expanded my personal knowledge not only of SFL as a paradigm but its possible practical application in the classroom for students. SFL is a way of viewing language in an integrated manner rather than analyzing and teaching specific language features in isolation. If students can understand and use the common threads of language that occur across and within fields or subjects and genres, they will be able to successfully engage in academic writing on many levels. The metafunctions of language work in tandem through SFL; in other words, language choice and grammar, for example, cannot be expressed in isolation without considering the context and functions of that language use. Having learned about SFL, however, I’ve realized the adage, “the more I learn, the more I realize how much I don’t know” is applicable here as SFL is complex, and I definitely have more to learn in order to understand the concept and its applications comprehensively.

Professionally, through this study, I have come to view and hope to practice teaching and assessment of L2 academic writing in an integrated and explicit way. This poses a challenge as often the writing skill and language features in general are presented in our curriculum, and therefore instructed, separately. In the case of grammar, taught as a subskill of writing in many preparatory programs in the region, present perfect aspect, for example, can be used to express time when giving an introduction but, using an SFL approach, the writer/speaker must consider what he/she wants to express (ideational) and to whom—the audience (interpersonal) and in which mode in a coherent manner (textual). Further, considering genre, the present perfect aspect is appropriate for an introduction but
may not be as accurate or appropriate consistently in an autobiographical recount. I realize that teaching without considering the metafunctions and genres misinforms instruction and negatively affects my students by separating and detaching language. Consequently, assessing students’ work by separating language elements and assessing them prescriptively (such as counting grammatical errors) without giving a clear guideline of positive characteristics of academic writing is simply telling students what to do implicitly without showing them or giving an explicit path to accomplished writing, much like a presenting a goal with few or no objectives or feedback on how to reach it. This study has given me a more comprehensive way of teaching/assessing and looking at language use to bring into the writing classroom—one I hope to share with colleagues and students.
APPENDIX A

Consent Form (English)

January 2, 2015

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research with female preparatory year students in Saudi Arabia from January-March, 2015. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation.

The topic of my master’s capstone (thesis) is an analysis of academic writing in higher education in Saudi Arabia. I plan to describe the use of language in preparatory year students’ academic writing. If you agree to participate, I will collect one of your written essays from this class. The writing samples will be collected one time during the semester by your instructor, copies of the samples will be made, and the copies will be given to me for analysis. The samples used will be one of your planned course assignments—there will be no extra writing assignments for this research. After completing the capstone, the final results will be available to you and the university through the Bush Library or by contacting me for a copy.

There is little to no risk if you choose to allow me to use your essay or written work in my research. It will in no way reflect on you or your grade in the course and will provide no extra work in or out of class. Further, the research analysis results will be anonymous and confidential and any mention of your identity (name or student ID number) will be removed. Your written work will be kept secure and destroyed once the project is completed and approved.

Participation in the research is voluntary, and, at any time, you may decline to have your essay analyzed or to have your essay content deleted from the capstone without negative consequences.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University and from the Female Campus administration to conduct this study. This research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will be catalogued in Hamline’s Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository, and it may be published or used in other ways. My results might be included in an article in a professional journal or book or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to your instructor. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,
Informed Consent to Participate in the Writing Analysis Research
*Please return this page to your teacher.*

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will use my written work/essay. I understand that providing access to my written work poses little to no risk to me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the research project at any time without negative consequences.

________________________________________
Signature

______________________
Date
APPENDIX B

Consent Form (Arabic)

التاريخ : 02 يناير 2015

لتطلب دراسة عينة ، أدرس في درجة علمية مقدمة (شهادة عليا) في التعليم في جامعة هامليون ، سينث بول مينيسوتا ، الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. وكجزء من مشروع تخرجي ، فإنك أختم إجراء بحث مع طلاب السنة الإعدادية (التعليمي) في المملكة العربية السعودية. في يناير حتى مارس 2015. وألغى من هذا المشروع هو طلب مشتركت.

بروضوع رسالة المستجيب الخاصة بي هو تحليل الكتبية الأكاديمية في مجال التعليم العالي في المملكة العربية السعودية. أفتد وأختم على المشاركة ، سوف نقوم بجمع مقال واحد فقط من مقاطع الكتابة من هذا الفصل. وسوف يتم تشكيل الجودة والنماذج الكتابية لمثل هذا الفصل. وسوف يتم أخذ نسخ من الجودة والنماذج الكتابية. سوف يتم إعطاء النسخة التحليلية. وسوف تكون النماذج المستخدمة أحد واجبات المقرر الدراسي. يمكن أن هذا البحث لا يتطلب من الطلاب عمل واجبات كتابية أضافية.

بعد الانتهاء من الرسالة ، سوف تكون النتائج النهائية مانحة لكم والجامعة. من خلال مكتبة بوش أو من خلال الاتصال بنا للحصول.

على النشاة.

راكود الناقد على أنه لا يوجد عليه أي خطر وإن تحدث أي مشكل أو مخاطر إذا قررت واعترفت أن نحن قادرون على استخدام مقاطع الكتابة أو أعمالي الكتابية في بحث. حيث أن ذلك إن أي برتر جذب من الأحوال على درجاتك وتقييماتك في المقرر الدراسي. إن شكل عنا ضافكنا على لكل سواء داخل أو خارج الفصل. وعامة على ذلك ، فإن النتائج التحليلية لبحث سوف تكون مجهولة الهوية وسرية وخصوصية الكتابة ، وسوف يتم إزالة وحذف أي ذكر يتعلق بهويتك (اسم أو رقم تعريف الطالب). ونكذب أن أعمالي الكتابية سوف يتم الإحتفاظ بها بشكل منفصل للسرية والخصوصية ، وسوف يتم التخلص من جميع الأعمال الكتابية بمجرد انتهاء المشروع واعتماده بالموافقة عليه.

المشاركة في هذا البحث تطوعي اختياري. وبحكم لكم في أي وقت رفض تحليل مقاطع الكتابة. كما يمكن أن نطلب حذف محتمل مقاطع الكتابة من النسخة ، دون تكلفة أو عواقب سلبية.

لقد حصلت على موافقة من مديرية كلية التعليم في جامعة هامليون ، ومن مشرف البرنامج الإعدادي (التعليمي) لإجراء هذه الدراسة. وهذا البحث هو منحة دراسية عامة ، وخلالية البحث والنماذج النهائية سوف يتم فهسته وتبتوبه في الأعمال الرقية بكمية بوبس في جامعة هامليون ، وهو عبارة عن موضوع (بواليا) الكرونيكية يمكن البحث فيها ، كما يمكن تشمل أو استخدامات أخرى. وقد يتم نشر النتائج في مقاولة جلية مهنية أو كتاب أو في إطار مؤتمر مشروعي. وفي جميع الحالات ، سوف نقل هويتك ومشاركتك في هذه الدروسية خاصة وخصوصا.

ذا وافقت على المشاركة. طرفين من الاحتفاظ بهذه الصفحة. وتم توقيع الاتفاقية المتفقين للاستلام (نسخة طويل الأمل من الاتفاقية) للمشارك في الصفحة الثانية. ثم يتم تسليمهما إلى المعلم أو المشرف الشخصي لكم. وفي حالة كان لديهم المزيد من الاستفسارات ، ففي بعدي.

تحديد البريد الإلكتروني: pderaney01@hamline.edu

055 808 2200
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