Synonymy as a Cohesive Device in Students' English Essay Writing

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Abstract

English writing as a productive skill, is the most challenging skill for EFL students. Nowadays, writing cohesive texts is of great importance especially the essay writing. Consequently, this study is concerned with the use of synonymy as one of the lexical cohesive devices in EFL students' essay writing. This study aims at identifying the most frequently used synonyms in Iraqi university students' essay writing. It also aims at investigating the way in which the use of synonyms as a lexical device contributes in building-up a well-built cohesive essay. Twenty male and female/ third-year students in the English Department, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar-Iraq were purposively chosen to participate in writing twenty descriptive essays. A qualitative research design was used in data collection using writing task instrument. Thus, data were analyzed qualitatively using content qualitative analysis procedure. Findings revealed that the frequency of synonymy occurrence in the students' essays was more than that of near-synonymy type. It was also indicated that the students used different synonyms and near-synonyms in their essays to achieve the goal of logical cohesion though they have a little knowledge of this type, synonymy, of lexical cohesive devices. It was also revealed that they have problems in the selection of the appropriate synonyms in their writings due to the lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Productive skill ، essay writing, cohesive texts, lexical cohesive devices, EFL students

1.Introduction

Cohesion refers to the relation between the parts of a text. Hence, Halliday and Hasan (1976) in their model "Theory of cohesion" referred to two types of cohesion: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. On one hand, grammatical cohesion is a reference to the idea of using different grammatical aspects in a text such as; reference, conjunction, ellipsis, and substitution. On the other hand,

lexical cohesion refers to the use of certain lexical cohesive ties in texts such as; repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, collocation, and antonymy. Consequently, the understanding of the relationship between the text and its interpretation outside it depends on the use of both kinds of cohesion. Hence, writers should have at their disposal creating cohesion in written texts (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

As far as past researches of cohesive devices are concerned, there were various previous studies conducted. For instance, Louise (1999) implemented a purely quantitative study to determine to what extent lexical cohesion contributes to achieve the coherence of a text as well as to describe the types of lexical devices used in students' academic writing. The study concluded that the relationship is found between lexical cohesion and coherence in students' academic writing. It also explained the term "coherence" in students' academic writing.

Another quantitative study was done by Kamal (2006) to investigate how lexical devices used by Arab in their academic written texts to construct cohesive texts. The study concluded that learners use weak lexical ties in their writing. In addition, Hellalet (2013) conducted a study with the aim of determining the extent to which Moroccan college students based on lexical cohesive ties to achieve native-sounding texts. The study concluded that students use the repetition device more than other devices since they do not know the other types of cohesion to join their paragraphs to form a cohesive text. Another quantitative study conducted by Moh'd (2015) to investigate the ability of EFL learners in the use of cohesive devices in their writings as well as the type of cohesion used. The study concluded that learners face difficulty in the use of cohesive devices in their writings.

As for qualitative researches, few studies were achieved, for instance, Abdul-Amir (2013) conducted a purely qualitative study to investigate college-level Arabic L1 users' command of cohesive devices and to examine the extent to which Omani student-teachers of English and native speakers differ in their use of cohesive devices in descriptive English writings. The study concluded that Omani students do not have sufficient ability in their use of cohesive devices in their writings. Besides, Jassim, et al (2016) conducted a qualitative study which aims at investigating the influence of Arabic language as a mother tongue on using English grammatical cohesive devices in argumentative essays by Iraqi EFL tertiary students. The study concluded that Arabic writing and its grammatical devices have an impact on using English grammatical devices in students' argumentative essays. In another study, Jassim (2017) also conducted a study with the aim of calculating the kind of cohesive devices used by undergraduate university students in their writings. The study

concluded that students have the ability to use almost all cohesive devices except difficult ones. Nindya, and Widiati (2020) also conducted another study which aims at investigating Indonesian EFL learners' ability to use cohesive devices in their writings. The study concluded that the learners committed errors in their use of grammatical cohesion.

Moreover, some previous studies used mixed-mode research methods that is, quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the use of cohesive devices in students' writings. For example, a mixed-methods study was done by Indah (2015) to explore the difficulties encounter by undergraduate students in using cohesive devices in writings. The study concluded that English department students utilize various cohesive devices in their essays, though they face problems in their use of cohesive devices. Another study conducted by Tenri (2019) to describe the lexical and grammatical cohesion utilized by students in essay writing. The study concluded that all cohesive devices are utilized by the students in their essays, though the lexical devices were widely utilized in their writings.

Generally, quantitative studies searched for numerical analysis of cohesive devices utilized by students in their writings, while qualitative studies searched for qualitative analysis of cohesive devices utilized by students in their writings. Thus, a qualitative analysis of cohesive devices in English essay writing was seldom utilized by researchers. Therefore, the current study is mainly based on the qualitative method of data collection and analysis.

Furthermore, various studies dealt with the use of cohesive devices in written texts in general without focusing on a particular one. For instance, there is no specific study conducted to investigate the significance of synonymy as a lexical tie in essay writing. Consequently, this device is still unclear on the part of EFL students therefore the current study aims at:
1. Identifying the most frequently used synonyms in Iraqi university students' English essay writing.
2. Investigating how the use of synonyms as a lexical cohesive device contributes in constructing a well-built cohesive essay.

The findings of the current study might be significant for Iraqi university students in constructing well-built English essay writing. This study might also be significant in the field of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. It might motivate Iraqi EFL students to use synonyms in their writing tasks. This study helps learners of English to achieve a clear idea about cohesive devices and their role in constructing English texts.

2. Literature Review

This section highlights the most relevant theoretical perspectives and concepts related to the current study. As this study aims at investigating the use of synonymy as a lexical cohesive device in constructing a well-built students' English essay writing, it is of most important to clarify the concepts related to this study, namely; cohesion in written texts, synonymy as a lexical cohesive device and its classification by different scholars.

2.1 Cohesion in Written Texts

Cohesion was introduced firstly by Halliday and Hasan (1976) in their book "Cohesion in English". Cohesion refers to the interrelationship among different elements of a specific text therefore it allows the reader to derive meaning from the text. Moreover, Halliday and Hasan (1976) indicate that cohesion is a semantic concept which refers to the relation of meaning that exists in a text and makes it a cohesive text. In addition, Gramley and Kurt-Michael (1992) state that cohesion is established when the interpretation of certain components of a text depends on that of another. Furthermore, Cruse (2006) establishes that cohesion refers to the ways of tying one piece of text to another. Accordingly, cohesion is a feature of written discourse which is related to the concepts of text, texture, and tie. Hence, it is utilized in texts to distinguish a series of sentences that form a text from each other. Moreover, cohesion can be achieved by using both grammar and vocabulary. In addition, Martin (2015) states that cohesion is the concept that achieved through the structural organization of language. It is also viewed as the way in which ideas are tied and ordered (Basturkmen, 2002). Grabe (1984) establishes that cohesion appears in the external forms of a text to signal relationships that hold between sentences or clausal units in that text.

Furthermore, Cox, et al (1990) state that writers utilize cohesion to convey meaning within and   across clauses in texts. Besides, Koda (2005) indicates that cohesion gives the reader sufficient information about the text. It helps the reader know how sentences are connected together. Baker (1992: 180) states that cohesion "the network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations that provide ties among various parts of a text". Markels (1983) refers to cohesion as both semantic and syntactic phenomenon. Hence, cohesion is achieved when certain term, whether it is explicit or implicit, has an important semantic position in a paragraph in addition to its occupation of the crucial syntactic position in each sentence in this paragraph. As it is indicated by Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion constructs a regularity of semantic relationship among the elements of discourse. It is considered as the formal aspect of language in written discourse. Thus, cohesion is viewed as the relationship between sentences in a

text in terms of both lexical and grammatical levels. Therefore, writers are able to construct good texts when they have a mastery of cohesion.

Consequently, Halliday and Hassan (1976) mention that cohesion is divided into two kinds i.e., grammatical and lexical cohesion. What is more, cohesion refers to grammatical and lexical relationships between two or more linguistic units in written discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

However, Halliday and Hasan (1976) indicate that cohesive devices refer to those words or phrases that make the parts of a text hold together. Those scholars mention five kinds of cohesive devices. These devices are conjunction, reference, ellipsis, substitution, and lexical devices. Hence, the first four types

are purely related to grammatical cohesion whereas the lexical devices are the relationship between a specific lexical item and another one appearing previously in the same text. Based on Halliday and Hasans' (1976) model of cohesion, the four kinds of grammatical cohesive devices are explained as; Firstly, Reference; it is usually used in semantics to clarify the relationship between a specific word and its referent in the real world. It is divided into three subtypes; nominal, comparative, and demonstrative reference. Secondly, Substitution; it has a sense to identity relation instead of a reference identity relation. Thirdly, Ellipsis; it includes the omission of a specific word, phrase or a whole clause whose meaning can be understood from the context. Ellipsis cohesion is either nominal, verbal, or clausal depending on the deleted component. Finally, Conjunction; it refers to the use of certain words that linking phrases, clauses, or specific sections of a text to express the logical and semantic relationships. Conjunction cohesion has four categories; additive, temporal, adversative, and causative (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

However, lexical relations refer not only to the semantic interpretation of a given utterance but also they are controlled by the arrangement of words in sentences as well as the relationship of certain words to the surrounding ones (Palmer, 1976; Stanojevic, 2012). Thus, Halliday and Hasan (1976) provide two types of lexical cohesion i.e., reiteration and collocation. As it is indicated by Andrew Ford (2004), reiteration is a lexical cohesion which includes reiteration of certain lexical items. Thus, reiteration consists of several forms such as; First; Repetition; it appears when specific words repeated several times in the text. For example: *"I met some young ladies at the conference. The ladies were good looking"*. In this instance, the word '*ladies*' is repeated two times (Osisanwo, 2005). Second; Synonymy; it is a form of reiteration which occurs instead of

repeating the same word thus, another word is utilized in a text with the same or nearly the same meaning. For example: *"Accordingly, I took leave and turned to the ascent of the peak. The climb is perfectly easy"*. The words *"ascent"* and *"climb"* refer to the same thing though they do not have the exact meaning. Third; Antonym; as it is defined by Yule (2006), refers to two or more forms with opposite meanings. Thus, antonyms are of two kinds: gradable and non-gradable. Gradable antonyms are utilized in comparative construction for instance; *"I am bigger than you and a pony is smaller than a horse (smaller/ bigger)"*. On contrary, non-gradable antonyms are not utilized in comparative construction for instance; the pairs: male/female, married/single, true/false (Yule, 2006). Fourth; Hyponymy; it refers to the general-specific relationship between two items. For instance, *'spring wheat'* is the hyponym of *'wheat'* (Paltridge, 2012:119-120). Fifth; Meronymy; it refers to the whole-part relationship between items. For instance, the words *'kernel'* and *'silk'* are meronyms of *'ear'* (Paltridge, 2012:120).

The second type of lexical cohesion is collocation. Halliday and Hasan (1976) state that collocation refers to the case whereby items occurring in similar environments because they describe things or events which have similar situations. For example, if a reader notices the noun *'pipe'* in certain sentence, it is probably that the verb *'to smoke'* will also appear in such sentence.

What is more, Mathews (2007) refers to collocation as the relationship that exists within a syntactic unit between individual lexical items. For example: *"My pen hates me"*. In the given sentence, the word *'pen'* collocates with the pronoun *'me'*. Consequently, collocation is utilized when certain items are specifically or habitually go together. Hence, it refers to the association of items that co-occur together. It involves a combination of adjectives and nouns; the *'right direction'*, or verbs and nouns; *'love'* and *'book'* (Paltridge, 2012: 121).

2.2 Synonymy as a Lexical Cohesive Device

Generally, synonymy is the main concern of the current study. However, Webster (1968) states that synonymy received its first concern in the second half of the 18th century and exactly in 1766 in England by Reverent John Trusler. This scholar wrote a book under the name "The difference between words esteemed synonymous". Furthermore, Jackson (1988) indicates that the term "synonymy" is a Greek one. It consists of two parts i.e., 'synonymy' means "same + name". It is also expressed in two ways "either more than one lexical item have the same meaning or the same meaning is expressed by more than one lexical item" (Jackson, 1988:64). However, synonymy refers to the formal variation of a concept-function (Glynn, 2012). Murphy (2013) proposes that English users are comfortable with not

only the term, but also with its meaning as well as she states that synonymy is one of a few metalinguistic terms utilized by people in everyday language. Gries and Otani (2010) indicate that the study of synonymy is considered as a fruitful area of linguistics. They say that synonymy is a linguistically lexical relation that exists in written discourse. John, Benjamins (2014) states that two or more lexemes are considered synonyms if replacing one by the other does not alter the meaning of the phrase. In addition, Ginzburg, et al (1979) state that synonyms are items with different pronunciation but they have similar meaning. Though, there are no two items with a purely identical meaning except some technical terms. However, (Cooper, 1973) there are no exact synonyms with exact the same meaning. In fact, the phenomenon of sameness might include words of different parts of speech. For instance, the verb *'sleeping'* has nearly the same meaning with the adjective *'asleep'*;

 1."He is sleeping.
 2. He is asleep". (Hurford and and Heasley, 1983)

However, Palmer (1981) pretends that it is impossible to find two words with exact the same meaning appearing in any language. To support this, Palmer states that complete synonymy is uncommon, whereas near-synonymy is commonly occurred in texts. Also, Laufer (1997) indicates that exact synonymy is mainly confined to technical terms such as; *"groundhog"* and *"woodchuck"*   Thus, synonymy became an important aspect in learning and teaching the foreign language. In spite of, the term 'synonymy' has different views, yet, its significance is still agreed upon by various linguists (Halliday, 1987). As it is stated by Ellis (1994), synonyms are most important for EFL students. In addition, he points out that EFL learners are not received the required exposure to a word in its various contexts. Also, Francis (1994) mentions that synonyms are important cohesive ties utilized in written discourse.

Besides, synonyms have a great contribution in text cohesion via using certain lexical items. To achieve cohesiveness in texts, synonymy or near-synonymy is used to refer back to an item to which it is related via a common referent (Halliday and Hassan, 1976). Newmark (1988) also adds that synonyms are always utilized as lexical cohesive ties to join not only the components of sentences but also the inter sentential elements with each other. Consequently, synonymy plays a crucial role in texts as it aims at decreasing the number of shades of meaning. Synonymy has various functions in language. Hence, it can be utilized to achieve certain purposes such as; to avoid repetition in texts, to secure cohesion, to expand the text and avoid redundancy, to provide the topic with additional comments, and to avoid poor style (Newmark, 1981). Besides, synonymy is

always utilized by the writers to involve crucial topic words into their writings (McCarthy, 1991).

2.3 Classifications of Synonymy

Synonymy is classified differently by different linguists. Each one of them introduced different classifications. Those classifications may refer to the same or to different terminology. As an example of those classifications, there are two scholars mentioned in the current study (i.e., Halliday and Hasan, 1976; and Cruse, 1986) who classify synonymy differently. However, Halliday and Hasan (1976) introduce two types of synonymy; i.e., synonymy and near-synonymy. Cruse (1986) introduces three types of synonymy; i.e., absolute synonymy, cognitive synonymy, and plesionymy.

2.3.1 Halliday and Hasan's Classification of Synonymy

Halliday and Hasan (1976:331) provide two types of synonymy: synonymy and near-synonymy as explained below.

1. Synonymy

Synonymy is a word which has a close relatedness of meaning with the preceding one (with identity of reference). In this sense, a word has certain relation with another equivalent one which preceded it in the same context. This word has the ability to co-occur with its preceded referent in a text. Hence, it is based on the degree of similarity between words (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Furthermore, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) state that synonymy is a reference to the lexical items that have identity of reference. For example:

 "To hear a sound, but I could figure out where that noise came from".

In the previous instance, the word *'noise'* refers back to the word *'sound'*. As a result, both words have the same level of generality therefore both words are synonyms (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:572).

2. Near-Synonymy

Generally, the term 'near-synonymy' is a reference to two or more lexical items appearing in the same context without having identity of reference. Thus, a lexical item that synonymously refers back to a preceding one is not of the same entity.

However, it is not necessarily for two lexical items to have the same referent to make cohesive. Therefore, the occurrence of synonymy is still cohesive in spite of the absence of referential relation (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). For example:

"Why does this little boy have to wriggle all the time? Good boys don't wriggle" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:282).

In the above instance, the words *'boy'* and *'boys'* are not co-referential since the word *'boys'* does not refer to the *'little boy that wriggles all the time'*. Anyway, the lexical items *'boy'* and *'boys'* still make a cohesive relation. Accordingly, many instances of cohesion

are purely lexical; that is, the occurrence of certain lexical items in a text is functionally lexical though they are not based on the relation of reference. Consequently, near-synonymy refers to "a word that does not have close relatedness of meaning with the preceding one (without identity of reference) and both words do not have the right to co-occur in different texts. It is dependent on the degree of similarity between both words". (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:283)

2.3.2 Cruse's Classification of Synonymy

Cruse (1986) introduces three types of synonymy; absolute, cognitive, and peliesonmy synonymy as explained below:

1.Absolute Synonymy

Generally, Cruse (1986) indicates that absolute synonymy is expressed by some words as perfect, total, complete, actual, real or full synonymy. Furthermore, the term "absolute synonymy" refers to two lexical items which considered absolute synonyms, i.e., they have similar meaning when all their contextual relations are identical. Also, Cruse says that absolute synonyms are unattainable and impractical since their relations cannot be easily tested in all contexts. However, the degree of similarity changes by time. Therefore, Cruse (1986) introduces the words *'sofa'* and *'settee'* as an example. The given words are regarded synonyms hence the word *'sofa'* is viewed more elegant than the word *'settee'*. Consequently, the word *'settee'* is nowadays considered as more elegant than the word *'sofa'*. The given words are considered as absolute synonyms by some people (Cruse, 1986).

2. Cognitive Synonymy

To start with, Cruse (1986:88) defines the term "cognitive synonymy" as; "X is a cognitive synonym of Y if (i) X and Y are syntactically identical, and (ii) any grammatical declarative sentence S containing X has equivalent truth – conditions to another sentence S1, which is identical to S except that X is replaced by Y". Thus, the words; *'aid'* and *'assistance'* are regarded as cognitive synonyms in the following examples since the two sentences have the same truth-conditions based on the definition above:

1. "The crisis cannot be solved without the aid of the international community.

2. The crisis cannot be solved without the assistance of the international   community".
(Cruse, 1986:88)

However, linguists claim "that any two lexical words having semantic similarity are known as cognitive synonyms. In fact, this opinion may be refused because each lexical word has meaning but not the reverse; i.e., the meaning does not refer to the same lexical item. Hence, for instance, the verb *'kill'* is considered as a synonym of

the verb *'murder'* but not the reverse since the killing that happens accidentally is different from committing it intentionally i.e. *'murder'''*. (Cruse, 1986:88)

3. Plesionymy (Near-Synonymy)

Cruse (1986:89) states that "plesionms yield sentences with different truth conditions; that is, two sentences differ only in respect of plesionms in parallel syntactic positions which are not mutually entailing". Though, the lexical words are in hyponymous relations, there will be unilateral entailment. In addition, plesionymy may introduce sentences with unlike propositional contents. However, plesionms refer to the lexical items that share certain aspects of meaning and differ in others. Thus, near-synonyms

(plesionms) are expressions which have more or less similarity in meaning. Furthermore, plesionms are often distinguished from one another in respect of "subordinate traits". Subordinate traits refer to those traits which have a specific role within the meaning of an item in respect to that of a modifier in a syntactic construction. For example, the item *'red'* in *'a red hat'* and the item *'quickly'* in *'ran quickly'* (Cruse, 1986:287).

3. Methodology

This section sheds light on the main procedures utilized in conducting the current study.

3.1 Research Design of the Study

Research design is the logical plan for conducting a study. The main purpose of doing research design is to clarify how the researcher gets answers to his research questions. Thus, it includes the link among the research questions, the data collection, and the procedures of analyzing the data (Robert, 2011). Moreover, a research design is related to the study design including data collection procedures, selecting samples, and data analysis procedures (Kumar, 2011). However, the researchers of the current study applied a qualitative research method whereby qualitative data were selected and analyzed qualitatively based on Halliday and Hasan's model of cohesion (1976). Catherine (2007); and Kvale (1996) state that a qualitative research is conducted to discover the experiences of participants. Hence, the given word proposes the use of qualitative research. Moreover, Richards and Schmidt (2002) indicate that qualitative research is a type of research in which the procedures used depend on non-numerical data. For instance, case studies, interviews, conversations or written data. Hence, such type of research is based on using words instead of numbers in the analysis of its data. A qualitative research is also viewed by Denzin and Lincoln (2005: P. 3 as cited by Creswell, 2007: 36) as "the activity which places the observer in the world". It involves a set of interpretive, material practices which make the

phenomenon more visible. Therefore, qualitative method deals with an object in its natural setting attempting to make sense or interpret certain phenomena according to the meaning given by people (Creswell, 2007).

Therefore, the present study is considered a qualitative one as it studies the given phenomenon, that is, synonymy as a cohesive device, in depth attempting to investigate how the use of synonymy as a lexical cohesive device contributes in constructing a well-built cohesive essay as well as identifying the most frequently used synonyms in Iraqi university students' essay writing. To scientifically attain these aims, the study utilized this kind of research. Thus, qualitative research method was used in this study to arrive at a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study.

3.2 Participants of the Study

Based on the given research design and due to the objectives of the study and its research questions a purposive sampling was utilized in the current study. Anyway, purposive sampling is a reference to the selection of participants or sites which are expected to help the researcher understand the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2012). Besides, Creswell (2005) indicates that purposive sampling is a type of sampling whereby a specific setting, events and persons are intentionally selected to achieve the required information (Creswell, 2005). Kumar (2011) also mentions that purposive sampling gives the best information for qualitative researches to accomplish the objectives of the study. Thus, researchers

often select their samples that provide the required information (Kumar, 2011). Thus, the selection of the sample in any study is not an easy task since it depends on several criteria which have an influence upon the type of the selected research such as: the background knowledge, age, gender, and nationality of the participants (Catherine, 2007).

Based on the criteria above, the researcher of the present study selected twenty undergraduate EFL students in their third-year of the academic year 2020-2021 at university of Anbar- College of Education for Humanities-English Department. Morse (2000) states that qualitative researches do not require a large number of participants thus, qualitative data is adequate if it consists of 5 to 50 participants. Also, analyzing a large number of essays, articles, book chapters and so on are not highly accepted in qualitative researches. Thus, 10 essays out of 20 were analyzed to answer the second research question of this study. The reason for this issue was that the researcher did not get any new findings from the analysis of the other essays. This process refers to the attainment of the saturation point in the analysis of the data (Morse, 2000). However, those participants

were asked to write descriptive essays of about 300 words on a given topic. Those participants were selected purposively since they have the required features: they learn English as a foreign language, they were from the same academic year, and they have studied the rules of cohesion and its application in essay writing in the first semester of the third-year. Furthermore, the intended participants had a specific course learning the rules of essay writing. Deliberately, data were collected from university students because they have much knowledge of using cohesive ties in their writing. The sample of this study involved 20 students (as mentioned above) that is, 10 males and 10 females with the age of 21-23. All students were Iraqi who have passed through different courses learning the basic rules of the English language writing.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Generally, the current study implemented qualitative data collection instruments whereby students were required to complete a writing task. Hence, the data were collected from writing descriptive essays of about 300 words by 20 students. In fact, students were given a chance to learn about cohesion and coherence throughout their study. Consequently, it was supposed that the participants of this study have the ability to write well-built cohesive essays on the topic given by the researcher.

Thus, the main purpose of the present study is to investigate the use of synonymy as a lexical cohesive device in students' English essay writing.

3.4 Procedures of the Study

Generally, twenty undergraduate students were purposively selected from the third-year/department of English/ College of Education for Humanities/ University of Anbar in the academic year 2020-2021. Moreover, the students were selected equally i.e.; 10 males and 10 females. Therefore, the total number of participants was 20. All of them were at the same grade and department. Anyway, the selected participants were asked to complete a written task. The task was based on a given topic, "Describing a day to remember at your university life". The main goal behind designing this task was to investigate the use of synonymy as a lexical cohesive device in students' essay writing and to identify the frequency with which synonymy was used by students. Therefore, the researcher focused on synonymy as one of lexical devices mentioned in Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion. Consequently, the students were asked to write their essays with the emphasis on utilizing lexical ties including synonyms.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Based on the nature of the objectives of the study and its research questions, the analysis of data in the current study was done

qualitatively. The type of analysis used is known as content analysis. David and Peter (2003) indicate that content analysis is a procedure utilized in analyzing texts   components. This procedure was utilized to answer the second question of the current study that is, "How the use of synonymy as a lexical cohesive device contributes in constructing a well-built cohesive essay?"

Furthermore, with content analysis procedure, the researcher is able to discover the links and relations among words. Thus, the researcher has a chance to find out the clarity of connections that may exist. What is more, the content analysis process enables the researcher of the current study to explore and identify the relationship among words of the text. Consequently, using such qualitative procedure of analysis helps the researcher focus on the meaning synonymous words within the context rather than their inherent meanings (David and Peter, 2003).

To answer the first question of the present study that is, "What type of synonyms most frequently used in Iraqi university students' essay writing?" A quantifying qualitative analysis was utilized. As it is indicated by Creswell (2012), this type of qualitative analysis is achieved by enumeration. Thus, enumeration is a process of quantifying qualitative data therefore it is often used in qualitative researches. This procedure is often adopted in qualitative researches for certain reasons such as; to count the number of times a word appears in a text, and so on. Furthermore, Heigham and Robert (2009) add that quantification is also utilized in qualitative researches and there are several ways of quantifying qualitative data. One way is to count the number of times whereby certain aspect appears as it was done in the analysis of the data in the current study when the researcher counted the frequency of synonymy as lexical cohesive ties used in students' essays.

In addition, Strauss and Corbin (1990) state the possibility of using a quantifying qualitative analysis when the aim is to achieve more interpretative than statistical in the analysis of data. Thus, a quantifying qualitative procedure was used in the analysis of students' essays to identify the most frequently synonyms used by Iraqi university students in essay writing.

The analysis of the data of the current study was based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion. Thus, the written essays were analyzed qualitatively to investigate the use of synonymy as a lexical cohesive device in those texts. In fact, Halliday and Hasan (1976) introduce two types of synonymy; synonymy and near-synonymy in their model. Therefore, the researcher of the current study analyzed the occurrence of synonymy and near-synonymy in students' essays. Based on this model, synonymy refers to an item that

has a close relatedness of meaning with a preceding one (with identity of reference). Here, a word has its relation with another equivalent one which preceded it in the same context. This item can be co-occurred with its preceded referent in a text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Consequently, the researcher analyzed all essays according to the relatedness of words in their meaning in the same context. On contrary, near-synonymy is seen as an item that does not have close relatedness of meaning with the preceding one (without identity of reference) and both items do not have the ability to be co-occurred in different texts.

Based on the degree of similarity between words, the researcher gave the following examples to show the way of analysis: For example, the words *"sunset"* and *"sundown"*; and *"bachelor"* and *"single male"* are included in certain text. Here, those words are analyzed as: the word *"sunset"* refers to a particular event which considered as a perceptual phenomenon while the word *"sundown"* refers to defining a moment in a specific time although it indicates the same event. Consequently, both words are near-synonyms because they lack their close relatedness in meaning therefore they could not co-occur in different texts. Although there is no identity of reference between the two words yet, they still make the text a cohesive text. Another instance is the relationship between the expressions *"bachelor"* and *"single male"*. Here, both expressions refer to unmarried male. The two expressions are synonyms because they have a close relatedness as well as they could co-occur in different texts. There is also identity of reference between both expressions. Consequently, both expressions contribute in constructing a well-built cohesive text.

4. Findings of the Study

The present study is a qualitative one which was dependent on a qualitative content analysis procedure. Thus, this type of a qualitative analysis based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion. Hence, for the purpose of analyzing the participants' written essays, a qualitative content analysis was used to investigate how the use of synonyms as a lexical cohesive tie contributes in constructing a well-built cohesive essay. In addition, a qualitative quantifying analysis was used to identify which type of synonymy most frequently utilized in Iraqi university students' essay writing. In fact, there are two research questions which would be answered via the use of the above mentioned qualitative procedures. The first question is that: "What type of synonyms most frequently used in Iraqi university students' English essay?" The second question is that: "How the use of synonymy as a cohesive device contributes in the construction of a well-organized cohesive essay?"

Accordingly, the data used in the first research question was collected by the means of writing task, written by the participants of the study. Based on aforementioned procedure of analysis, findings relevant to the first research question reveal that students were more familiar with sunonyms than with near synonyms. Table (4.1)shows the frequency of synonymy and near-synonymy occurrence in the students' writing task.

Table (4.1) The frequency of synonymy and near-synonymy occurrence

Synonymy types	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage %	Number of essays	Total No.
Synonymy	104	54.16%	20	192
Near-synonymy	88	45.83%		

Based on the given table, it was found that the students utilized both types of synonymy though, the average was different. As it was revealed, the frequency of synonymy occurrence utilized by the participants in all the essays was (104) while the frequency of near-synonymy occurrence utilized was only (88). As a result, the percentage of synonymy was 54.16% whereas the percentage of near-synonymy was 45.83%. The following figure shows the percentage of the frequency of synonymy and near-synonymy occurrence in the students' essays.
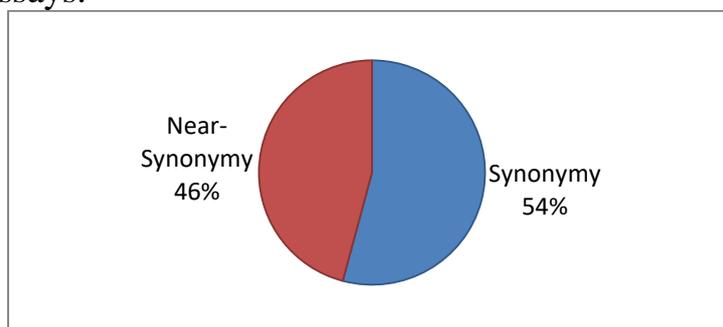

Figure (4.1) The percentage of synonymy and near-synonymy occurrence in students' essays

Furthermore, the data used in the second research question was collected via conducting writing tasks, written by the participants of the study. Hence, 10 essays were analyzed qualitatively following a content qualitative procedure. Based on this way of analysis, it was found that the students utilized all types of synonymy in their writings. Hence, synonymy was utilized in the students' essays as a lexical tie to enhance their writings with cohesion. As it was showed, synonymy refers to those items which carry a close relatedness meaning. Therefore, this kind of synonymy (according to Halliday and Hasan's, 1976 model) has an identity of reference since both words or phrases utilized in the same context have the capability of co-referring to each other.

In addition, those items have the tendency to co-occur in different contexts since they have a close related meaning. For instance, the verbs *"begin"* and *"start"* utilized by the students had a tendency of co-occurrence and co-reference since they both had a related meaning whether they are used in their current context or in other ones. As in: *"...the birthday owner <u>started</u> asking…"; "...and doubts <u>began </u>to come to him….".* However, all the utilized synonyms contributed in the development of the essays in which were used. Then, the unity of those essays was achieved due to that, all their paragraphs were hung together via the use of those synonyms as cohesive ties. In contrast, the near-synonyms were appeared without having a close related meaning in the students' essays. Those items lack the idea of identity of reference since they could not co-refer to each other. They are also lack the co-occurrence relationship because they do not have the ability to co-refer in different contexts. Though, the near-synonyms had the capacity to link the parts of the essays together and made them more cohesive ones. For example, the words *"department"* and *"section"* utilized by the participants having near-synonymous meanings though they played a great role in the construction the essay in which they were used then, that essay became a cohesive one. As in; *"...in the English language <u>department</u>…"; "...my love of this <u>section</u>…".*

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Synonymy as a cohesive device is an important device in essay writing. However, its use developing and constructing the EFL students' English essay writing is still inadequate. Furthermore, the influence of utilizing synonymy to develop and improve the English essay writing is also still unclear in the past literature. In any case, with reference to the first research question; i.e., "What type of synonyms most frequently used in Iraqi university students' essay writing?", the findings showed that the highest occurrence was synonymy type since it counted (104) in all essays representing 54.16%. Besides, the lowest occurrence was near-synonymy with (88) occurrence in the same essays representing 45.83%. However, the findings of the current study were in agreements with some of other past studies (Hellalet 2013; Abdul-Amir 2013; Indah 2015; Jassim 2017). Thus, all of those studies dealt with the role of cohesive devices in written texts. Despite such similarity, the current study was different from these past studies in the phenomenon under study. Hence, the present study dealt with the significance of synonymy as one of cohesive ties used in the construction of the given English essays. This phenomenon had not been investigated before by the previous studies. The study was also different from the other past studies in terms of its objectives, methods of research, participants,

and the procedures used in the data collection and analysis. However, the frequency and percentage of synonymy might have a reference to the students' knowledge of such type of synonymy in addition to their awareness about its significance and usage. In the contrary, the little use of near-synonymy type in the participants' writings, in most of them, was due to their insufficient knowledge of this type.

With reference to the second research question; "How the use of synonyms as a lexical cohesive device contributes in constructing a well-built cohesive essay?, the findings revealed that the participants implemented both synonyms and near-synonyms to create cohesion in their writings. Thus, the use of synonymy brought an influence on the cohesion of those essays. It also avoided classical and boring writing (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Moreover, the analysis of the data in the current study was mainly based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion. However, most of the previous studies based on other models in the analysis of their data in addition to Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model such as: Hellalet (2013) based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion and on Hoey's taxonomies (1991). Furthermore, all the past studies showed different findings from those obtained in this study when analyzing their data such as Jassim, et al. (2016). The study also revealed that the students utilized different synonyms and near-synonyms in their essays to accomplish the goal of logical cohesion though they have a little experience of the use of near synonymy type. Finally, findings showed that some participants had problems in the selection of the appropriate synonyms in their essays, for example, they used the words *"department"* and *"section"* as two concepts referred to the same reference.

With reference to the above mentioned findings, this overuse or inappropriate of synonyms by some of students in their essays might be attributed to the fact that those students did not distinguish between the two types of synonymy i.e., synonymy and near-synonymy. Furthermore, some students had little vocabulary knowledge and restricted choice of words. Hence, because of such limited vocabulary, some of them repeated specific synonyms several times in their essays or utilized inappropriate ones. Thus, the main end of the current study was to investigate how the use of synonymy helps Iraqi EFL university students in building-up a well-organized cohesive English essay. However, it was concluded that synonymy is used as a cohesive device in the construction of a well-built English essay by the Iraqi EFL undergraduate students. To add more, it was observed that Iraqi EFL undergraduate students used both types of synonymy in their essays. Though, some students did not utilize synonyms properly since they faced certain difficulties in distinguishing between the two types of synonyms. Consequently, they implemented a few number of

synonymy as well as their repetition of the same synonyms throughout their writings. As a result, the quality of their essays was influenced by the above mentioned problems. In any case, the current study was limited to one semester in which the participants have learned the use of cohesive devices in essay writings. Thus, this short period of time was insufficient to improve the students' knowledge concerning the use of synonymy as a lexical device in their essay writings. As a result, along-period study is recommended to provide the participants with ample learning opportunities to practice the use of synonymy as a cohesive tie in their writings. In addition, this study was limited to the online teaching of cohesive devices that students had undergone throughout the semester. Accordingly, future studies are recommended to be conducted by face to face meeting with the participants to avoid the problems faced in this study. However, this study helped the Iraqi EFL university students in improving and developing their writing skills. It also encouraged the Iraqi EFL students and their teachers in English departments to consider the importance of using cohesive devices in general and synonymy in particular when writing any piece of written texts. To end with, this study motivated the teachers of the English writing skills in Iraqi universities to teach their students cohesive devices and their usage when teaching to achieve well-structured cohesive texts.

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