

Textual Variation in L2 Academic Writing: A Study of Cultural Visibility in Lexico-Grammatical Choices and Semantic Relations

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Abstract— *The impact of culture on academic writing in terms of the lexico-grammatical choices and semantic relations between and across clauses formally referred to as cohesion has been reported to cause textual variations in second language writing. Premised on this assumption, this study investigates the argumentative essays of Saudi EFL students to gauge the extent to which the use of cohesive devices in academic writing is impacted by the cultural framework. The results obtained through non-parametric correlation analysis revealed that culture did impact the choice of cohesion devices but was not pervasive enough to establish the claim of previous research. Word-level lexical repetition was the most statistically significant cohesive device which corresponded with the cultural framework followed by statistically non-significant instances of the additive conjunction, the General noun, and the context-based Reference. The author argues that the pedagogic and learning processes overshadow the cultural impact as student writers acquire writing proficiency to produce academically appropriate texts. However, an analysis of the narrative or the descriptive writing can further validate the findings of this research. The study also recommends a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analysis of both English and Arabic texts to further substantiate the notion of cultural influences in creating textual variations.*

Keywords— Academic writing; cohesive devices; contrastive rhetoric; cultural contrasts; discourse community; textual variations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary descriptions of writing in the Contrastive Rhetoric Theory (CRT), Genre Theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), World Englishes etc. assume an interplay of both linguistic and extra-linguistic phenomena as central to the creation of academically appropriate text (Ahmad, 2017; Ahmad, 2020). An obvious implication of such an approach to academic discourse entails that writing is embedded in the culture in which it is produced. Cultural context has been reported to cause formal textual variations in writing (Kaplan, 1966), and many a researcher in the Contrastive Rhetoric Theory (CRT) tradition (e.g. Conner, 2000; Holliday, 1999) have attempted to test the assumption that writers across cultures adhere to different rhetorical expectations and conventions which are peculiar to the writer's culture, and these account for variation in writing styles across different cultures. Following Ahmad (2019a, p. 279) that "one of the key functions of writing pedagogy in academic contexts is to facilitate student writers gain membership of their specific discourse communities via acquisition of the contemporary practices in the domain of academic literacy", the impact of pedagogic interventions and culture on academic writing in terms of the

lexico-grammatical choices and semantic relations between and across clauses formally referred to as cohesion thus assumes a special significance for the researchers and the practitioners of writing studies.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Culture and second language (L2) writing

While writing in languages other than the first language (L1), it is likely that language learners draw on experiences and habits from their use of L1 and the native culture. In applied linguistics, this distinction has been explored and described by contrastive linguistic and contrastive rhetorical studies. Yoshimura cited in Walker (2010, p. 50) argued that "intercultural rhetoric-oriented writing instruction can enable students to improve their writing effectiveness, awareness of audience expectations in the target language, and ability to avoid negative transfer from the L1 to the L2". Kaplan (1966), however, was the first to mention rhetorical variations in writing produced by L2 writers. Grabe and Kaplan as cited in Corral-Robles et al. (2017, p.2), attribute seven levels of variations in the discourse features: 1) rhetorical patterns, 2) composing conventions (pre-writing, data collection, revision), 3) morphosyntax at intersentential level, 4) coherence mechanisms of the target language, 5) writing conventions and text appearance, 6) expectations of the target language, and 7) the subject to be discussed in the target culture. These discoursal variations may be the cause of cultural influence or as Usyal (2008) suggests, the outcome of educational context, L2 competence, the topic, audience and L1 transfer. Walker (2010, p.212) claims that undermining cultural variations can result in breaks in effective communication and "discrimination of another sort". This entails that a functional knowledge of these discourse features is expected to enable students achieve appropriate discourse competence in L2 writing. This is true of even writing for business purposes where the national and cultural background of the writers determine the efficiency of business interaction (Malyuga and Orlova as cited in Demir, 2019, p.537).

Several studies support the impact of cultural variation on the written product. For instance, a study of the rhetorical organization of research article introductions by the Chinese and the English writers by Loi and Evans (2010) found the former less obtrusive in making claims or counterclaims than their English counterparts. The researchers attributed the cause

of rhetorical strategy to variations in culture. This was corroborated by a study by Candarh (2012, p.16) which found Turkish writers less explicit in argumentation than the native English writers. The researcher believed that this might be due to "the low-context communication of English-speaking societies". Similarly, the issue of patriarchy is supported by rhetorical preferences for individualism and logical argument in a study by Chen (2007), which found Chinese students frequently citing authority in their research papers primarily because the teachers and the old masters are assumed authority on the subject. This was also supported by a study by Mu et al (2015), which found Chinese research articles resorting more to factual evidence as compared with the English research articles who employed hedges for substantiating the inferential evidence.

Conner (1996) claims that Kaplan's (1966) notion of the "Oriental" was actually misinterpreted by many to include differences in the thinking processes also. Kaplan (1988) himself refuted this since he believed that there were no differences both in the L1 and L2 as far as the cognitive processes involved in the production of texts were concerned. Kaplan's original stance that L2 academic writing would appear ambiguous to most western readers was corroborated by research findings of L2 writing in contexts such as China, Japan, and Korea (Walker, 2010). For instance, English rhetorical conventions prefer to use adversarial style in processing arguments in writing. This oppositional argumentation which is often ascribed to the English preference for individualism appears "alien and hard" to the L2 student writers (Belcher as cited in Yeung, 2019, p.33). This point is further substantiated by Cao cited in Wu and Baccanello (2019, p.463) who finds "linguistic uncertainty" in Chinese owing to structural and syntactical ambiguity which when transferred to English writing may result in vague and ambiguous expressions that can lend themselves to different interpretations by a non-Chinese audience, thereby resulting in communication gaps or breaks.

On the other hand, researchers such as Long-Fu (2001 p.2) observe that "the fact that language is deeply embedded in culture and that each language is part of a culture has not always been recognized or assumed". Hence, the stance of CRT that cultural variations shape writing experience in L2 has frequently been critiqued on multiple grounds. CRT has been criticized for promoting idealized and distorted representations of typical genres and language practices. Scholars have also questioned CRT for its homogeneous, stereotypical, ethnocentric, and simply inaccurate rendering of cultures. Moreover, comparisons that represent languages and genres in terms derived from the contrasting language and culture have also been found ambiguous as are the representations of simple causal relations in complex contexts where multiple causes might have been entertained.

The nature of relationship between language and culture as being ambiguous has been reported by several studies such as that of Nambiar and Anawar (2017). This perspective challenges both the notion and the extent to which culture dictates the choice of lexico-grammatical and semantic features in the creation of texts. Kubota (1998b), for instance,

reexamined Kaplan's (1966) claim about Japanese students' writing, and found that there was no strong evidence to support that culturally unique patterns either existed or were transferred to students' English writing. She suggested that L2 student writers be taught the most frequently occurring discourse conventions. This was, however, refuted by Atkinson (1999a, p.746) who argued that "Kubota's techniques are textbook cases of essentializing, determinism, and reductionism, which is rather alarming given that these are the very sins that she sees herself attacking". Moreover, Y. Kachru (2001) found out that, with the varieties of English usage, there was no single system or form of English itself. This was further validated by Kubota and Lehner (2004, p.10) who argued that contrastive rhetoric focused mainly on the traditional "inner circle" of rhetorical varieties of English as a point of reference and it failed to validate the "outer rhetorical circle" of English. Similarly, Mabuan's (2017) research showed that despite association with one main culture, the Filipino and the Sinhalese writers preferred to choose a variety of rhetorical structures in their attempt to create different micro-genres in order to convey the intended meaning. Studies of Taiwanese students by Chinese and Singaporean students by Liu as cited in Yeung (2019 p.32) refute the claims of the contrastive rhetoric that second language learners diverge from the linear pattern of English writing. Both the Taiwanese and Singaporean students "organized their essays much like their L1 counterparts in an Anglo-American style".

2.2. Cohesion in CRT

The concept of cohesion in CRT is linked with the concept of text linguistics which targets linguistic analysis of cohesion, coherence, schematic structure or superstructure (Enkvist, 1987). A text is a syntactically well-formed group of structures which adopt logical progression in their arrangement so as to conform to the expectations of specific audience in specific situation and context (*ibid*). Following Bachman and Palmer's (2010) description of grammatical and pragmatic knowledge, cohesion can be assumed to be at the interface of both types of knowledge. Cohesion, in this regard, can be specifically understood as a configuration of the lexico-grammatical devices to mark the relationship between sentences and groups of sentences. From CRT perspective, Connor (1996) maintains, a meaningful text reflects an overall coherent structure which is, in fact, realized through logical links or cohesive devices. In short, cohesive devices in CRT scheme of work supply a framework for coherence, while coherence allows the reader to build a model of comprehension (Limon, 2008).

2.3. Impact of Arab Culture on use of cohesion

The impact of culture on the use of cohesive devices in Arab EFL or academic writing has been frequently reported by researchers. Almehmadi (2012) investigated newspaper articles using CRT framework. Her findings confirmed Kaplan's (1966) and Ostler's (1987) conclusions that Arabic used coordinating conjunction "and" wa (Arabic equivalent) to construct lengthy sentences. Besides, she also noted the impact of culture in relation to the use of lexical repetition in both Arabic and English with Arabic showing a higher frequency of repetition – a characteristic of Arabic writing. Arabic cohesion

is thus "repetition-oriented" whereas English cohesion is "change-oriented" (Mohamed and Omar as cited in Almehmadi, 2012 p.74). Furthermore, English is "a writer-responsibility language" meaning thereby that it is the writer who guides his readers in appropriate interpretation and comprehension of the text (Hinds, 1987 p.144). This entails that English has a wider repertoire of cohesive devices than Arabic which is a "reader oriented" language where the reader makes a lot of inferences to identify the writer's message. Arabic texts, thus, are "more tolerant of ambiguity impressions of statements and absence of clearly stated discourse organizers" (Mohamed and Omer, 2000 p.50). This is likely to impact the choice of lexico-grammar as well as semantic associations in the rhetorical structuring of the text. Ahmad (2017 p.43) observes:

Arab culture is patriarchic implying that power relations are pre-established at all levels of social hierarchy. Such a social arrangement discourages independent opinion and critical judgment, and can be viewed as contradicting with the individualistic and low contact English speaking cultures where argumentation is openly accepted and appreciated.

Studies in the Arab EFL context also refer to culture as both the supporting and impeding factor in students' choice of the lexico-grammar. A study by Saud (2015) in Saudi Arabian academic context, for instance, revealed that the Saudi students struggled with creating cohesive links in their writing due to impact from culture and Arabic language. This finding was further supported by a research by Alluhaydan (2016) who found out that negative transfer among Saudi EFL learners impeded production of academically appropriate texts which he thought resulted in misuse of word repetition, parallel structures, and overuse of particular syntactic structures. When Saudi students write in English, their discourse is impacted by L1 and may read ambiguous conveying different layers of meaning. This contrasts with conventions of academic writing in English which prescribe an impersonal and direct mode of address.

2.4. Cultural Neutrality in Academic Discourse

All things being equal, the assumption that language is embedded in the socio-cultural context entails that language as a written product manifests cultural influences in the linguistic, structural, and stylistic choices made by the writer while producing a text. However, generalizing this paradigm to academic writing which is the outcome of continuous pedagogic interventions spread over a number of years challenge the notion of academic writing as being global in its composition with a "common" language (Belchik as cited in Tuzlukova and Al-Busaidi, 2015 p.255) at its core. Academic discourse is peculiar for its "culturally neutral" (Liyanage and Walker, 2014 p.2) make-up for it employs the discourse conventions of the specific discourse community it is identified with. Students of academic writing are, thus, expected to acquire discourse competence whereby they could produce academically appropriate texts with comprehension appeal to the academic community across the globe. Here comes the role of writing pedagogy which according to Gore (1993) reorients the learners to produce texts for the specific audience and the intended purpose. McInnes (2006) finds students of academic

writing overlooking cultural influences in favour of a globally accepted academic variety as they get into the process of learning to write in academic settings.

More specifically, the representation of English and Arabic cultural dimensions referred to by researchers such as Jandt (1995), Mohamed and Omar (2000) and Ostler (1987), and used as framework for cohesion analysis for this study, and various related statements about argumentativeness, patriarchy, etc. are deeply problematic representations of highly complex and heterogeneous groups of people. In fact, Arabic has a long and illustrious history of literate practices, so how does "Arabic culture", presumably from Morocco to Iraq, get labeled as "oral." English speaking people talk a lot and many people growing up with varieties of English central to their linguistic repertoires engage in pretty limited ways with texts but all get labeled as "literate". These perspectives on academic writing prompted the present study.

III. AIM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Researchers in the Arab writing studies have pointed to the cultural dimension as a determinant of linguistic choices, rhetorical structuring and stylistic preferences. Jandt (1995), Mohammad and Omer (2000), Ostler (1987) etc. have studied the impact of culture on the use of cohesive devices in written discourse of the Arab speakers. They adopted a five-dimensional framework (Appendix 1) to segregate the influence of culture on the cohesive property of a text. Since, most of these studies were based on samples of writing that were narratives or English translations of the Arabic narratives or media discourse, the researcher was interested to find out if the analysis of cohesion devices in academic writing which is formally learnt in academic settings over a considerable period of time will yield similar results when analyzed on this framework.

Moreover, Arab EFL research focusing on the impact of culture on the choice of cohesive devices in academic writing is not conclusive. One of the serious limitations of the studies on culture and cohesion in the Arab EFL context such as that of Mohammad and Omer (2000) is that they do not supply sufficient empirical evidence to support the effect of culture on cohesion in writing. This leaves a visible gap in the research domain of cultural effects on cohesion as the assumption of cultural influence on the use of cohesion cannot be substantiated through empirical findings. The present study, therefore, aims to investigate empirically if the relationship between culture and cohesion in academic writing is factual or fallacious.

In the absence of strong empirical evidence that supports cultural impact on the use of cohesive devices, the researcher challenges the cultural dimension framework (Appendix 1) previously used by Jandt (1995), Ostler (1987) and Mohammad and Omer (2000) etc., and proposes to investigate if the notion of cohesive contrasts in the cultural framework is factual or fallacious as far as pedagogically induced academic writing is concerned. The study will be possibly the first of its orientation in the Arab EFL context to seek empirical evidence on the proposed model of analysis for argumentative writing. This will provide some useful insights not only into the effect of culture

on L2 writing but also into the future pedagogic and research initiatives. This study will also try to identify whether Saudi students fulfill the conventions of academic writing through the use of grammatical and lexical cohesion. The findings may be helpful for the course designers of academic writing in Saudi settings whereby they could provide for sufficient awareness raising and training to the students to enable them internalize the discourse requirements of the target language.

IV. METHOD

4.1. Participant Information

Following Ahmad (2019b), the researcher decided to use purposive sampling for the collection of data which was conducted at the English Language Center, Yanbu (ELCY), Saudi Arabia. The ELCY offered English language courses to the Preparatory, Associate and Undergraduate level Saudi students. The purposive sampling was selected because of its homogeneous features (Howell, 2010) which were expected in the sample for this study. All the participants were male Saudi undergraduate students in approximately the same age group i.e. 20 to 21 years, and had been at the ELCY for more than two years on the Preparatory and Associate degree courses. Being from a similar lingual and cultural context, these students shared a similar objective of completing the academic writing course to start training in their respective technology, and eventually graduate successfully. The sample texts ($N = 30$ of the argumentative essays) were produced by the subjects in the Mid and the Final Term Examination. By the time the subjects wrote these essays, they had received two years English language instruction at the same institute. The resource book for the course *Writing Academic English* (4th ed) by Oshima and Hogue (2006) provided for instruction in both the micro-linguistic features such as the cohesive devices, and the discourse level practice in paragraph and essay writing. The students were assessed formatively as well as summatively through In-class Assignments, Quizzes, Mid and the Final Term Examination. A final score of 60% or more would qualify them to take up professional degrees in various subject specialism leading to a Bachelor of Technology certificate.

4.2. Data Analytic Tool

Argumentative essays ($n=30$) written by Saudi undergraduate students in an examination setting at the English Language Center at Yanbu, Saudi Arabia were chosen for analysis. The essays were typed in the word file with all the errors intact to maintain transparency. The researcher used the framework which had earlier been applied by Jandt (1995), Ostler (1987) and Mohammad and Omer (2000) to find out the extent to which L1 culture influenced students' use of cohesive devices in English in terms of cohesive contrasts. These studies had done cross-linguistic analysis of the Arabic texts and their English translations. The present study chose only examination scripts produced in English by Saudi EFL students assuming the sample texts would provide a fair analysis of the effect of culture on second language use. Moreover, this study analyzed argumentative essays as opposed to, for instance, Mohammad and Omer's (2000) which investigated narrative texts. Hence, any variations in generalizing the results to the previous

research would not be surprising. Analysis of English-only texts was also anticipated to unveil the role of pedagogic intervention in impacting students' writing in regard to cultural influences. Cohesive contrasts have been understood to be those patterns of cohesion which show marked impact of the native culture. Arabic and English speaking cultures have been distinguished from each other on the basis of following dimensions (Mohammad and Omer, 2000; Ostler, 1987 etc.). Table 1 below shows these differences:

TABLE 1. Dimensions of Arabic and English speaking cultures

Arabic speaking Culture	English speaking Culture
1 Oralized	Literate
2 Collectivist	Individualist
3 High contact	Low contact
4 High context	Low context
5 Reader responsible	Writer responsible

These cultural dimensions affect the use of cohesive devices (CDs) and researchers in the Arab context have reported differences in the use of cohesive devices between Arabic and English as context-based vs text-based, generalized vs specified, repetition-oriented vs change-oriented, and additive vs non-additive (Appendix 1).

The researcher adopted Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy and sentence units (SU) for analysis of cohesion. As such the sample texts were segregated into words per text (WPT) and cohesive devices per text (CDPT). Frequency counts for each of the cultural dimension represented by the respective cohesive category (as coded in Appendix 1) were then conducted. The results of the frequency counts were then used to explain salient features in the use of cohesive devices in regard to their impact from L1 culture. The data analysis software SPSS was used to obtain the sum, mean (M), standard deviation (SD), median (Md), quartile range (IQR) as well as percentage scores for each category of cohesion in the cultural framework. Non-parametric correlation such as the Spearman's Rho (r_s), was also performed to find out any statistically significant associations among the variables. The results revealed prominent and less prominent cohesive devices and were helpful in explaining the role of Arab culture in the choice and use of cohesive devices in the argumentative essays written by Saudi EFL students.

4.3. Reliability

The researcher himself coded and analyzed all sample texts for analysis of cohesion. However, 25% systematically chosen representative sample of the texts was analyzed by another rater. The inter-rater reliability was set on a point-by-point basis, and a reliability score of 91.15% was calculated which, following Sekran (2006) if exceeds 80%, can be accepted for further analysis.

V. RESULTS

The sub-sections below present the results obtained from the textual analysis of the students' writing:

5.1. CDs in the Cultural Framework

The corpus of the sample texts (Table 2) comprised of 11436 words, 628 sentence units and 1954 cohesive devices.

TABLE 2. Descriptive statistics for distribution of CDs in the corpus

	N	Sum	M	SD	Mdn	IQR
WPT	30	11436	381.20	84.076	375.00	166
SUPT	30	628	20.93	3.999	21.00	6
CDPT in the corpus	30	1954				
CDPT in the cultural framework	30	886	29.53	9.878	28.00	16

Table revealed that 886 out of 1954 CDs corresponded with the cultural framework. 80% of these were the lexical items (L1) which were predominantly repetition of the same word ($M = 23.70$; $SD = 8.949$; $Mdn = 21.00$; $IQR = 14$) followed by 6% each of Additive Conjunction (AC1) ($M = 1.77$; $SD = 2.388$; $Mdn = 1.00$; $IQR = 3$) and Generalized (*The + Noun*) (GN) cohesion ($M = 1.70$; $SD = 1.512$; $Mdn = 1.00$; $IQR = 1$) respectively. 5% of the Context-based reference (CR1) ($M = 1.37$; $SD = 1.84$; $Mdn = 1.00$; $IQR = 2$) had the lowest use in the corpus. The results indicated that Word-level Repetition (WL1) was the most evenly distributed pervasive device that impacted students' writing. Other type of devices were, however, not very frequently used and were unevenly scattered across the sample texts.

TABLE 3. Distribution of CDs in the framework of Arab cultural dimensions

	N	Sum	M	SD	Mdn	IQR	(% scores from n= 885)
CR1	30	41	1.37	1.847	1.00	2	5
GN	30	51	1.70	1.512	1.00	1	6
AC1	30	53	1.77	2.388	1.00	3	6
WL1	30	711	23.70	8.949	21.00	14	80
CL1	30	30	1.00	1.661	.00	1	3

5.2. Non-parametric Correlation Analysis

Spearman's rho (r_s) found the only statistically significant moderate relationship between the GN and WL1, $r_s = .475$; $p < .01$. The results indicated the possibility of a moderate positive linear increase in the GN with a corresponding increase in WL1.

5.3. Context-based Reference (CR1)

CR1 accounted for only 5% of the CDs in the framework (n= 886) which indicated that the students were not consistent in the use of this type of reference that spread unevenly across their texts. However, the use of CR1 was assumed to be a typical feature of Arabic discourse where a pronoun was used with possibility of having more than one presupposed items. In such case, the Arabic reader employed context clues to identify the exact antecedent of the pronoun. This contrasted with the typical English use of pronouns which traced their antecedents directly from the text. In other words, Arabic use of referential cohesion was sometimes context-based while that of English was text-based (Mohammad and Omer, 2000). The examples below taken from students' essays reveal how they used Context-based reference:

- i. The research have been taken from villages where they have nothing related to technology which is the most effective reason on cultural identity.
- ii. On the other hand, if the parents made a supervision for the suitable time for playing the video games by their children, there will be no time wasting and they will get the benifites as discussed.

In example (i), there was no textual antecedent for the pronominal "they" and the reader had to infer from the context that the pronoun referred to "*the villagers*". There were, however, two possible antecedents for "they" in example (ii) - "parents" and "children". The appropriate antecedent was identified from contextual inference instead of the textual evidence. These uses of the pronouns corresponded with the cultural dimension referred to as reader-responsible versus writer-responsible where Arabic associated itself with the former and English identified with the latter. The dimension determined the extent to which writing tolerated ambiguity, imprecision of statements, and lack of explicit transitions implying that it was the reader who was to ensure proper interpretation (Sa'Adeddin, 1989). This meant that Arabic writers used contextual clues to track the antecedent.

The context as Mohammad and Omer (2000) suggest, could be externally embedded in socio-cultural setting or internally situated in the text. The instance of CR1 identified in the sample texts was all internal to the texts, and no evidence of external contextual use was found. Mohammad and Omer (2000) analyzed narrative texts which allowed the external context to recur more frequently as compared with the academic essays, as that of the present study, which were more focused on the internal context due to restrictions of both the topic and the genre.

5.4. General *The + Noun* (GN)

GN was found to be only 6% of the CDs identified in the cultural framework for the study. This suggested that most of the students did not use this cohesive feature and also that its presence was widely distributed across the sample texts. GN pertained to the degree of specificity which an anaphor attached to its antecedent no matter endophoric or exophoric.

The following examples extracted from students' essays substantiated the use of GN:

- i. They belive that money is the reson behaind the happiness.
- ii. Some phsyiology studies found that at least of 80% of students who takes so much testing, the phsyiology state will be bad.

The examples show the generalized use of "*the + Noun*" to refer back to its antecedent which in an English speaking culture would have been replaced by co-referential possessive pronouns for specificity. Here, owing to Arab cultural influence, "*The + Noun*" implies that all instances of such use encompass the entire class of the referring noun. For instance, "*the happiness*" in (i) or "*the psychology state*" in (ii) may entail "*all happiness or happiness for all*" and "*the psychology state of all students*" respectively. An English speaker would probably rewrite these to make them explicitly specific: "*their happiness*", "*their psychology state*", "*our relationships*", "*his/their life*", and "*my mobile*".

However, the results of the use of Generalized (*The + Noun*) in the study reveal that such use was very rare, especially if compared with the frequency of possessives or deictic used in the study. The students used 118 deictic items in the corpus which accounted for 16.57% of the referential cohesion in the corpus (n=712). On the other hand, only 51 instances of the use

of GN could be identified in the corpus. This implied that the cultural influence on students' use of the generic reference was not very dominant. The students attempted to achieve formality through the use of the pronominals and the deictic which was a typical feature of academic writing. One possible implication for further research emerges out of this and that of a study which could investigate the factors that impede or facilitate the impact of Arab culture on academic writing.

5.5. Additive Conjunction (AC1)

AC1 contributed 6% of the CDs in the cultural framework. And like the CR1 and GN were unevenly spread over students' writing. AC1 extend the previously stated idea. Mohammad and Omer's (2000) claim that Arabic cohesion was mainly additive was not supported by the results of this study. Below are some of the references from students' texts to show how AC1 was used:

- i. And that (is) why they are facing a serious problems in college.
- ii. and also for Saudi boys when they start to wear clothes against our culture like wearing shorts or skinny jeans and doing new hair style that is new to our culture.

The use of "and" in example (i) had been often quoted as typical of Arabic discourse and most research in Arab context mentioned a high degree of its overuse, especially in students' writing (Hamed, 2014). However, following Halliday and Hasan (1976), distinction had to be made between the "and" which was coordinating, and the "and" which was conjunctive. The former was structural and, therefore, not cohesive while the latter which occurred in sentence initial position was additive and cohesive. Example (i) was one of the rare instances of the cohesive "and" in the corpus for the present study. Example (ii) had two additives "and also" used adjacently. The basic function was to supply extension to the meaning of the previous information; however, the use of "also" put a certain emphasis in retrospect.

Halliday and Hasan (1976 p.242) had enlisted no less than 23 additives in their taxonomy of conjunction. These additives with the primary function of adding new information to the previous also had many other secondary rhetorical properties such as alternatives (e.g. or, or else); emphatic additives (e.g. furthermore, in addition); de-emphatic (e.g. incidentally, by the way); expository (e.g. I mean, that is); and comparative (e.g. likewise, by contrast). The data for the use of additives in the present study unfolded that the exemplificatory "*for example*" was the most commonly used device accounting for 49. 09% of the use of all additives. Other additives identified in the corpus were "and", "and also", "that is", "moreover", "in addition", "furthermore", "or", "for instance" and "besides" which together made 50.91% of the overall use of additives in the study.

5.6. Word (WL1) and Clause-level Repetition (CL1)

Lexical cohesion in Arabic is dubbed as "repetition-oriented" while in English it is "change-oriented" (Mohammad and Omer, 2000 p.61). In Arabic, it follows repetition of the formal features whether at the word, phrase or clause level, whereas repetition in English follows changes in the formal features. 80% of the WL1 and 3% of the CL1 use collated with

most studies on Arabic discourse (Al-Jabouri, 1984, Koch, 1983). The excerpts from students' writing reveal how both word and clause level repetition were used:

- i. Although some people may think money is not important for happiness, I believe that you can buy any thing with money including happiness.
- ii. For example, if a boy playing violent video games for long period, he well grow up and trying to stimulate those scenes or moves that he already watched in violent video game. The boy who plays violent video games could grow up as a bully.
- iii. As I mention before technologies can be used in positive ways or negative ways.

Examples (i) and (ii) demonstrated the use of word-level repetition and as could be seen repetition of the same lexical item whether in the same clause or the previous clause or sentence had been employed by the students. The only exception to this pattern of use was that of "*the boy*" in (ii) which specified "*a boy*" in the previous clause. Example (iii) shows how students used clause-level repetition in their essays. Exactly the same syntactic structure that had been used earlier in the text was repeated.

Repetition as a cohesive devices in the framework for the present study seemed to be the only device supported by cultural impact. However, despite a high proportion of appropriate use (37.15%) in the overall corpus of CDs (n=1954), repetition in students' texts did not fully correspond with all the cohesion properties which were influenced by culture. Following Hoey's (1991a) claims that Lexical repetition was far more frequent than grammatical reference, the extensive use of repetition of the same item confirmed his stance, and might not be a result of cultural or any other factor. This was further corroborated by Bae (2011) whose study of the Korean learners had a similar finding. That suggested that the cultural factor did not predict the higher use of lexical cohesion. Nevertheless, one reason of highly frequent use of Lexical repetition seemed to be the relatively dense overuse of the repeated items which was 79% of the entire overuse in the corpus (n= 395). These overused items mostly related with the topic statement, and excessive overdependence on them pointed to the limited lexical range of the students. As such, different implications emerged out of this textual evidence. There was a serious need to identify strategies that could help students develop their lexical base so that overdependence on repetition was reduced to acceptable limits. Reading habits among Saudi EFL students were underdeveloped, so, if a writing course was integrated with the relevant reading of the sample texts, not only students' lexical knowledge would improve but also their overall reading comprehension, and so did their familiarity with language and discourse features of the target genre.

VI. DISCUSSION

45.34% of the entire CD use was identified with the cultural framework which was mainly based on the use of WL1. These findings support most research results on Lexical repetition such as that of Dastjerdi and Samian (2011).

The context and text based distinction between the use of pronouns is misleading. Ambiguity is inherent in all languages

and varies according to the genre and competence of the users. This is supported by Martin (1992) whose system network permits the choice of ambiguous participant tracking. Ambiguous anaphoric reference is also a typical feature of native speakers' spoken language and that of the secondary school level students, and thereby cannot be robustly associated with the cultural impact on writing.

Similarly, the visibly low percentage of the use of CR1 in the students' texts in the present study suggests that the effect of culture on the use of referential cohesion is not pervasive, and cohesive relationships are established via textual rather than contextual clues. This may signify a formative phase for the student writers where they seem to acculturate themselves into the norms and conventions of academic English. The impact of exposure to the target language through formal training appears more obvious than the role of culture in shaping discourse features. The main concern is, however, with the use of '*and*' as a conjunctive in argumentative genre, and the limited range of the use of other additive conjunctives on the part of students. Conjunctive '*and*' is inappropriate in this genre (especially compared to spoken narrative), and may be the greatest reason for its low frequency, especially if this forms part of the teaching in the writing programme. Lack of variety in the use of additives means that the students were unable to create a variety of rhetorical functions and the semantic association between one idea and its extension was restricted mostly to exemplification. Such a situation implies that the curricular and pedagogical priorities in regard to the teaching of conjunctions need revisiting.

The viable explanation for the use of "*The + Noun*" in Arabic discourse comes from the Arab culture. Zahrana (1995 p.249) found this to be because of Arab culture's preference for "indirect, vague, and ambiguous statements" which are embedded in "the function of language as a social lubricant aimed at promoting social harmony". This contrasts with the American culture's preference for "direct, frank and open communication" (*ibid*), and that is why English discourse creates direct and specific co-reference. Jandt (1995) mentions another difference in cultural dimension between the Arab and the English speaking which is that of collectivism and individualism. Arab culture associates itself with family, group and social experience as opposed to the English speaking which promotes individual enterprise. In addition, Arab culture is "high contact" as opposed to English which is "low contact" implying that there is high level physical, social and psychological proximity among the Arabs. Sharing common grounds in matters of communication is a norm in Arab culture and this necessitates the role of dependence on context for interpretation of meaning. "This is precisely what Arab readers do when faced with an anaphoric pronoun which has more than one possible referent: they use situational, cultural, and linguistic clues - rather than the pronoun itself - to identify the intended referent (context-based cohesion)" (Mohammad and Omer, 2000 p.67).

Repetition in Arabic is neither a linguistic nor a discoursal handicap rather it is an effective strategy in the construction and organization of discourse. Repetition can be a rhetorical strategy as it helps the reader retain information via exposure

and noticing of the repeated items, and then prepares him emotionally and psychologically to accept the writer's argument. This seems to be true of the present study where preponderance of repetitive items is observed. Similarly, repetition enhances textual coherence by establishing semantic relationships at the word and clause level in or across sentences. To achieve coherence, however, the use of synonyms and superordinates brings not only variety to the semantic relationships but also gives appropriate load to the semantic domain of the text. The texts in the present study do not appear to conform to this aspect because of the extremely high use of repetition and relatively far lesser use of other forms of reiteration. CL1 adds to the rhetorical and persuasive effect because of the parallel structures. However, there is not high proportion of CL1 in the texts for the present study and it cannot be assumed that the students adopted parallelism as a rhetorical strategy.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study comes with certain limitations. First, the study and the sample for text analysis was collected from one institution only which along with the sample size (n=30) subjects it to limited generalizability across other Arab EFL contexts in particular and global EFL contexts in general. In addition, the sample was collected from the male students, and therefore, the results may not include gender differences in the use of cohesive devices from cultural point of view. The study also did not include the impact from the Arabic language and its relation with the Arab culture which could, otherwise, might have given a fuller account of both the linguistic and the extra-linguistic influences on academic writing.

However, the study has a few viable implications for future research. A replica study from a larger population from the Arab EFL setting with a larger sample size is likely to be more generalizable. A research initiative that involves cross-linguistics analysis of Arabic and English texts has also the potential of further ascertaining the role of culture in cohesive features of academic writing. This model can be extended to include other languages to see similarities and difference of the cultural influences on writing. The effect of culture on academic writing can also be studied from dimensions other than cohesion to include coherence, rhetorical organization, and move analysis etc.

The case of lexical repetition of the same item, on the other hand, is not specific to Arab culture only; Iranian, Chinese and students from other cultural contexts (Dastjerdi and Samian, 2011; Liu and Braine, 2005; Sadighi and Heydari, 2012) have also been found of using excessive repetition of the same lexical item in their texts.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study attempted to ascertain the role of Arab culture on EFL students writing argumentative essays in English. The four-dimensional framework for analysis of cohesive properties - Context-based reference, Generalized (*The + Noun*), Additive conjunction, and Word and Clause level repetition - was primarily prompted by assumptions of cultural contrasts between the Arab and the English speaking cultures. These

contrasts are embedded in the both the cultures as the Arab culture is described as 'collective', 'high contact', 'high context', 'reader responsible', and 'oralized'. English speaking culture, on the other hand, is understood as individualistic, low contact, low context, writer responsible, and literate. These cultural similarities dictate the choice of linguistic and rhetorical features which are ultimately realized in both spoken and written discourse. Cohesion as a non-structural text-forming property is also affected by these influences. However, as the results of the study have revealed, the impact of culture on the choice of cohesive devices in academic writing is not pervasive and does not support the claims of previous research. It seems that cultural influences on discourse are either fallacious or (if there are any) may minimize with pedagogic, curricular, and extra-curricular interventions as has been observed in the use of Context-based reference, Generalized (*The + Noun*), and Additive conjunction. The case of lexical repetition of the same item, on the other hand, is not specific to Arab culture only; Iranian, Chinese and students from other cultural contexts have also been found of using excessive repetition of the same lexical item in their texts. This relatively lower use of culturally motivated cohesion in the students' texts suggests that the notion of cultural impact on the use of cohesive devices is either an exaggerated one with little empirical evidence as a proof or is pedagogically induced to put students in the process of academic acculturation whereby they begin to use culturally neutral language appropriate to their specific discourse community.

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SUPPLEMENTARY DATA
Appendix 1: Realization of cohesion in the cultural framework

Cohesion in Arabic	Typical realization	Cohesion in English	Typical realization
1 Context-based (anaphoric pronouns as reference items [CBR1])	Uses contextual intermediaries (the external situational or cultural context or the internal linguistic context) to identify the intended referent of the pronoun	1 Text-based (anaphoric pronouns or repeated nouns as reference items)	The referent is identified from within the text
2 Generalized [GN] (level of specificity in which cohesive relationships are established between anaphoric items and their antecedent whether such antecedents are recoverable from the text as endophoric reference or from external context as exophoric reference)	Generic forms of The + N	2 Specified (level of specificity in which cohesive relationships are established between anaphoric items and their antecedent whether such antecedents are recoverable from the text as endophoric reference or from external context as exophoric reference)	Co-referential possessive pronouns instead of The
3 Repetition-oriented (operates at the word [WL1] and the clause level [CL1])	Word level: reiteration of the same word Clause level: Arabic repeats clauses/sentences which are identical in formal and sometimes semantic features	3 Change-oriented (operates at the word and the clause level)	Word level: reiteration of the same word is replaced by either a pronoun (reference), or substitution, or ellipsis, or synonym Clause level: English clauses are repeated but with a noticeable degree of variation in formal features
4 Additive [AC1]	Conjunctive cohesion	4 Non-additive	Includes adversative, temporal, causative