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Lexical Cohesive Devices in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble*

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Abstract

Lexical cohesion constitutes an important mechanism through which textual continuity and meaning construction are achieved in discourse. This study investigates the deployment of lexical cohesive devices in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble* (2009), with a view to examining how antonymy, synonymy, and repetition contribute to textual cohesion and the construction of socio-cultural meanings. The research has become necessary as only a limited scholarly attention has been paid to the role of lexical cohesive devices in contemporary Nigerian fiction. The study is anchored on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Theory of Cohesion within the broader framework of Halliday's (1961) Systemic Functional Grammar. Fourteen purposively selected textual extracts from the novel were theoretically analysed. They comprise six instances of antonymy, five instances of synonymy, and three instances of repetition. Findings reveal that antonymy constitutes the most prominent lexical cohesive device in the selected corpus, followed by synonymy and repetition. The identified devices function as mechanisms of textual continuity as well as resources for representing gender experiences, social disparity, and communal conflict and reconciliation. The study concludes that lexical cohesion performs textual, thematic,

stylistic, and ideological functions simultaneously in the novel. It further demonstrates that lexical cohesive devices contribute significantly to the organization of meaning and the representation of social realities in literary discourse. This study on the discourse analysis of lexical cohesive devices in the novel *Beneath the Rubble* by a Nigerian author, Liwhu Betiang, makes an invaluable contribution to discourse analysis and Nigerian literary studies.
Keywords: Lexical cohesion, Discourse analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar, Literary discourse, textual cohesion, African fiction.

Introduction

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) view language as a social semiotic resource through which individuals make meaning and negotiate social relationships. Consequently, language is not merely a vehicle for transmitting information but a dynamic system through which people interpret and represent their world. Within this broad communicative framework, literature constitutes one of the most sophisticated manifestations of language use. Through literary texts, writers creatively employ linguistic resources to represent experiences, construct identities, communicate ideologies, and address social issues.

Literary discourse is characterised by deliberate linguistic choices designed to achieve specific aesthetic, communicative, and ideological purposes. According to Roberts and Jacobs (1999), literature encompasses imaginative works that tell stories, dramatise situations, express emotions, and explore ideas. The language of literature is carefully crafted to engage readers intellectually and emotionally while simultaneously conveying complex meanings.

Given the complexity of literary language, the interpretation of literary texts extends beyond the analysis of isolated linguistic units such as words, phrases, and sentences. Contemporary

linguistic scholarship increasingly emphasises the importance of examining language above the sentence level in order to understand how meaning is organised and communicated across larger stretches of discourse. This perspective has contributed significantly to the development of discourse analysis, a field concerned with the study of language in use and the relationship between texts and their social contexts. Discourse analysis investigates how linguistic elements interact to produce coherent and meaningful texts and how these texts function within particular socio-cultural environments (Gee, 2014; van Dijk, 2018).

Central to discourse analysis is the concept of cohesion. Cohesion refers to the semantic relationships that connect different parts of a text and enable readers to interpret the discourse as a unified whole. Halliday and Hasan (1976) argue that cohesion constitutes one of the essential properties of textuality because it creates links among textual elements and facilitates continuity of meaning. Through cohesive relations, individual sentences become interconnected and function collectively as a meaningful discourse rather than as isolated linguistic units.

More specifically, cohesion may be achieved through grammatical or lexical means. Grammatical cohesion includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, while lexical cohesion involves semantic relationships among lexical items. Lexical cohesion is particularly important in literary discourse because literary writers frequently rely on lexical choices to establish thematic continuity, characterise individuals, represent social realities, and guide readers' interpretations. Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify repetition, synonymy, antonymy, collocation, hyponymy, and super ordinate relations as major forms of lexical cohesion.

In recent years, developments in discourse studies have expanded the understanding of lexical cohesion beyond its traditional role as

a mechanism of textual continuity. Contemporary scholars increasingly view lexical cohesion as a discourse-semantic resource that contributes to meaning construction, ideological representation, and identity formation (Eggins, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2021). Lexical relations not only connect textual elements but also participate in the construction of social realities and cultural meanings. Through carefully selected lexical patterns, writers can foreground particular themes, represent social relationships, express attitudes, and communicate ideological positions.

Accordingly, the significance of lexical cohesion becomes particularly evident in literary texts that address complex socio-cultural issues. In such texts, lexical choices often function simultaneously as linguistic, stylistic, and ideological resources. Through repetition, synonymy, and antonymy, literary writers establish thematic coherence while also constructing representations of gender relations, power structures, social inequalities, cultural values, and communal experiences.

Against this theoretical backdrop, Liwhu Betiang's (2009) *Beneath the Rubble* provides a suitable text for investigating the role of lexical cohesion in literary discourse. The novel presents a rich exploration of social, political, cultural, and religious realities within an African community. Set in the fictional community of Agigah, the novel addresses issues such as communal conflict, political rivalry, gender relations, social inequality, power struggles, religious intolerance, sacrifice, and reconciliation. Through its portrayal of these issues, the novel offers valuable insights into the complexities of human relationships and communal life within Africa, particularly Nigerian societies.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on literary discourse, relatively little attention has been devoted to the role of lexical cohesive devices in the construction of meaning within Nigerian

novels. Existing research has focused predominantly on poetry, educational discourse, media discourse, and short stories, leaving a gap in the discourse-oriented study of lexical cohesion in contemporary Nigerian fiction. Furthermore, few studies have explored how lexical cohesion contributes simultaneously to textual organization, thematic development, and ideological representation.

It is within this context that the present study investigates the deployment of lexical cohesive devices in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble*. Specifically, the study focuses on antonymy, synonymy, and repetition with a view to examining how these devices contribute to textual cohesion and meaning construction. By applying the Theory of Cohesion of Halliday and Hasan (1976) within the framework of Halliday's (1961) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), which is an aspect of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between lexical choices and the representation of social realities in literary discourse.

Statement of the Problem

The interpretation of literary discourse depends not only on an understanding of individual words and sentences but also on an appreciation of the linguistic mechanisms that connect textual elements into meaningful wholes. Among these mechanisms, lexical cohesion plays a crucial role in establishing continuity, coherence, and thematic development within texts. Despite its recognis**ed importance in discourse organization**, many studies of African literary texts have concentrated primarily on thematic analysis, stylistics, gender representation, and socio-cultural criticism while paying limited attention to the discourse-semantic functions of lexical cohesive devices.

Similarly, studies on gender and ideology in literary discourse have provided valuable insights into the representation of social

realities in Nigerian fiction. However, such studies often emphasise thematic concerns without adequately examining the linguistic resources through which these meanings are constructed and communicated. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how lexical cohesive devices contribute to textual cohesion and facilitate the communication of thematic and ideological meanings.

Furthermore, although cohesion has been extensively investigated in educational discourse, media discourse, and poetry, relatively limited scholarly attention has been devoted to lexical cohesion in contemporary Nigerian novels. This gap is particularly noticeable in studies of Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble*, where little attention has been paid to the role of antonymy, synonymy, and repetition in discourse organization and meaning construction.

Against this backdrop, the problem addressed by this study is the inadequate scholarly attention given to the discourse functions of lexical cohesive devices in contemporary Nigerian fiction. Accordingly, the study seeks to examine how lexical cohesion contributes to textual organization, thematic development, and socio-cultural meaning construction in *Beneath the Rubble, a novel by* Liwhu Betiang (2009).

Literature Review

Discourse analysis has evolved into one of the most influential approaches in contemporary linguistics because it examines language beyond the sentence level and investigates how meanings are constructed within specific social and cultural contexts. According to van Dijk (2018), discourse is not merely a collection of linguistic structures but a medium through which knowledge, ideology, and social realities are produced and communicated. From this perspective, contemporary discourse studies focus on the dynamic relationship between language, context, and meaning. Moreover, recent scholarship emphasises that discourse analysis

provides valuable tools for understanding how texts achieve coherence, cohesion, and communicative effectiveness through linguistic choices.

Among the central concepts in discourse analysis is cohesion. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) seminal work establish cohesion as a fundamental property of textuality, and subsequent studies have expanded this understanding. In particular, recent research demonstrates that cohesion contributes not only to textual continuity but also to discourse organization, meaning construction, and communicative effectiveness across literary, academic, and media texts. Alyouse (2021) finds that cohesive relations function across multiple communicative modes, while Bhatnagar, Duari, and Gupta (2022) show that lexical cohesion significantly influences discourse comprehension and writing quality.

More specifically, lexical cohesion has received considerable scholarly attention because it is achieved through semantic relations among lexical items. According to González (2018), lexical cohesion should be viewed as a discourse-semantic resource that contributes to coherence, genre construction, and meaning-making. Lexical cohesive devices include repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation. Among these categories, repetition, synonymy, and antonymy are particularly significant because they establish explicit semantic connections that facilitate textual continuity, coherence, and thematic development.

Building on this understanding, recent studies have examined lexical cohesion across diverse discourse genres. Zahra, Emilia, and Nurlaelawati (2021) find that lexical cohesion contributes significantly to coherence in students' descriptive writing, while Machfudi (2022) demonstrates that lexical cohesion plays a crucial role in organizing digital discourse. Similarly, Liu (2025) observes

that cohesive patterns vary according to genre and communicative purpose, thereby reinforcing the view that lexical cohesion is context-sensitive. Furthermore, Mohammed, Frimpong, and Mintah (2026) reveal that cohesive devices contribute to persuasion and ideological representation in newspaper editorials.

Despite these valuable contributions, limited attention has been devoted to lexical cohesion in contemporary Nigerian fiction, particularly in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble*. Consequently, there remains a gap in scholarly understanding regarding how lexical cohesive devices function within the novel. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address by investigating how antonymy, synonymy, and repetition contribute to textual cohesion, thematic development, and socio-cultural meaning construction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), developed by M. A. K. Halliday in 1961 as an aspect of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and further advanced by subsequent scholars. SFG views language as a social semiotic system through which individuals construct meanings within specific social contexts. Unlike formal linguistic theories that focus primarily on grammatical structures, SFG emphasises the functional relationship between language and society. The theory assumes that language is a resource for meaning-making and that linguistic choices are influenced by the communicative purposes of language users. As a result, contemporary scholarship continues to regard SFG as one of the most influential frameworks for discourse analysis because of its ability to explain how texts achieve coherence and communicative effectiveness.

A fundamental principle of SFG is the notion that language simultaneously performs three metafunctions: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The ideational

metafunction enables language users to represent experiences and realities; the interpersonal metafunction facilitates the enactment of social relationships; while the textual metafunction organises linguistic elements into coherent and meaningful texts. Of particular relevance to this study is the textual metafunction, which explains how cohesion contributes to textual unity and discourse organization.

Within this framework, cohesion serves as a major resource for creating textual continuity. Cohesion model of Halliday and Hasan (1976) identifies lexical cohesion as one of the primary mechanisms through which texts achieve coherence. Consistent with this position, recent SFG-oriented studies continue to demonstrate the relevance of cohesion in discourse analysis. Kawabata (2025) argues that cohesion and coherence are interconnected dimensions of discourse quality and meaning-making, while Liu (2025) shows that cohesive patterns vary across genres and significantly influence discourse effectiveness. Alyouse (2021) demonstrates that cohesive relations function across linguistic and multimodal contexts, highlighting the adaptability of SFG to contemporary discourse studies.

Given these theoretical assumptions, SFG is particularly suitable for the present study because of its capacity to explain how lexical choices contribute to the construction of textual meanings. Therefore, SFG offers a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the relationship between lexical cohesion, textual organization, and meaning construction in literary discourse.

Empirical Review

With regard to empirical scholarship, previous studies have examined the role of lexical cohesion in different discourse contexts. For instance, Zahra, Emilia, and Nurlaelawati (2021) investigate lexical cohesion in students' descriptive essays and find that repetition and synonymy significantly enhance textual

coherence and readability. Similarly, Machfudi (2022) examines lexical cohesion in digital communication and reports that cohesive devices contribute substantially to discourse organization and audience engagement. Bhatnagar, Duari, and Gupta (2022) demonstrate that lexical cohesion positively influences reading comprehension and writing effectiveness, particularly in academic discourse.

Eme and Mbagwu (2011) is an investigation into cohesion without 'connectives' in the Igbo language using two poems, *Akpị* (scorpion) and *Ọnwụ* (death). The study exemplifies cohesion devices in Igbo poetry outside of connectives. They are anaphoric and cataphoric relation, sense inclusion, ellipsis, and repetition. These are non-grammatical devices and they provide aesthetic cohesion. Liu (2025) examines cohesive patterns across different genres and concludes that lexical cohesion varies according to communicative purpose and discourse context. The study reveals that repetition, synonymy, and antonymy play significant roles in maintaining coherence and reinforcing thematic development. In a related investigation, Mohammed, Frimpong, and Mintah (2026) analyse newspaper editorials and find that lexical cohesion contributes not only to textual unity but also to persuasion and ideological representation. Although these studies have provided valuable insights, most have focused on educational, media, digital, and multimodal discourse, almost leaving out literary discourse.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative discourse analytical design to examine lexical cohesive devices in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble*. The choice of this design was informed by its suitability for exploring linguistic phenomena within their natural textual contexts. More specifically, qualitative discourse analysis facilitates the interpretation of linguistic features and their contribution to textual cohesion, thematic development, and meaning construction in literary discourse. Consequently, the

design provided an appropriate framework for investigating how lexical cohesive devices function within the selected text.

For the selection of relevant extracts from *Beneath the Rubble, t*he study employed purposive sampling to identify, and extract relevant passages containing lexical cohesive relations, which were categorised according to their semantic relationships. Subsequently, the selected extracts were organised in accordance with the objectives of the study to facilitate a focused and coherent analysis in line with Theory of Cohesion by Halliday and Hasan (1976) within the broader framework of Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1961).

Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis of Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble* identified three major lexical cohesive devices: antonymy, synonymy, and repetition. These devices function as important discourse-semantic resources that contribute to textual cohesion, thematic continuity, and meaning construction within the novel. A total of fourteen lexical cohesive relations were identified, comprising six instances of antonymy, five instances of synonymy, and three instances of repetition. They are presented and analysed below:

Table 1: Antonymy in *Beneath the Rubble*

Lexical Pair	Page	Cohesive Function	Theme
Slave-Master	9	Semantic contrast	Gender oppression and domination
Questions–Answers	10	Knowledge opposition	Fear and uncertainty
Sympathy – Spite	109	Emotional contrast	Communal conflict
Conscious–Subconscious	109	Psychological opposition	Desire for peace
Good–Evil	106	Moral contrast	Social instability
Death Noose–Love Knot	180-181	Contextual antonymy	Reconciliation and transformation

Table 1 shows the antonymous lexical relations identified in the novel. The findings indicate that antonymy functions as an

important cohesive device through which the novelist creates semantic opposition and thematic contrast. The lexical pair *slave/master* foregrounds unequal power relations and the marginalization of vulnerable groups within society. Similarly, *good/evil* reflects the moral contradictions that characterise the community of Agigah, while *death noose/love knot* symbolises the transformation of hostility into reconciliation. These oppositional lexical relations establish cohesive ties across the discourse and contribute significantly to the representation of social conflict, inequality, morality, and communal renewal.

Table 2: Synonymy in *Beneath the Rubble*

Lexical Pair	Page	Cohesive Function	Theme
Young-Lovable	95	Semantic similarity	Family and interpersonal relations
Hurting-Sharp	95	Emotional reinforcement	Marital conflict
Feuds-Wrangling	118	Semantic continuity	Social division
Union-Bond	156	Semantic reinforcement	Unity and social cohesion
Amicability–Harmony	187	Semantic continuity	Reconciliation and peace

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that synonymy contributes significantly to textual cohesion and thematic continuity. Through semantic similarity, the novelist reinforces important concepts without unnecessary repetition. Lexical pairs such as *union/bond* and *amicability/harmony* strengthen the themes of unity, peace, and reconciliation that emerge toward the end of the narrative. Likewise, the pair *feuds/wrangling* emphasises the persistence of communal conflict and social division. The use of synonymy, therefore, enables the novelist to sustain thematic development while enriching the stylistic quality of the discourse.

Table 3: Repetition in *Beneath the Rubble*

Repeated Lexical Item	Page	Cohesive Function	Theme
Quarrel	136	Thematic emphasis	Conflict and hostility
Fighting	163	Reinforcement	Violence and insecurity
Death	10	Emphasis and continuity	Fear and instability

Table 3 reveals that repetition functions as an important lexical cohesive and emphatic device in *Beneath the Rubble*. The repeated lexical items *quarrel*, *fighting*, and *death* reinforce major themes of conflict, violence, fear, insecurity, and communal instability. Their recurrence establishes lexical chains that connect different parts of the narrative and sustain thematic continuity. Through repetition, the novelist continually foregrounds the destructive consequences of hostility and social unrest, thereby strengthening textual coherence and enhancing the emotional impact of the discourse.

Analysis of Lexical Cohesive Devices

The analysis of lexical cohesive devices in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble* reveals that antonymy, synonymy, and repetition function as important mechanisms for achieving textual cohesion and thematic development. These lexical relations establish semantic continuity across different parts of the narrative and contribute significantly to the construction of meaning. In this regard, the findings support Halliday and Hasan's (1976) assertion that lexical cohesion is fundamental to textuality because it enables readers to perceive a text as a unified and coherent discourse.

Among the identified lexical cohesive devices, antonymy emerges as the most prominent in the selected corpus. Lexical oppositions such as *slave/master*, *good/evil*, and *death noose/love knot* contribute not only to textual cohesion but also to the representation of ideological tensions and social contradictions within the narrative. More specifically, these oppositional relations foreground issues of power, domination, morality, conflict, and

reconciliation, thereby enhancing both thematic development and discourse coherence. Consequently, the predominance of antonymy observed in the study reinforces the argument of González (2018) that lexical cohesion operates as a discourse-semantic resource through which writers construct thematic and ideological meanings.

In a similar vein, synonymy contributes substantially to semantic continuity and thematic reinforcement. Lexical pairs such as *union/bond*, *amicability/harmony*, and *feuds/wrangling* maintain coherence while enriching expression through lexical variation. Through this strategy, the novelist strengthens characterization, reinforces central themes, and avoids unnecessary repetition. Accordingly, the findings corroborate previous studies which demonstrate that lexical cohesion enhances textual organization and contributes significantly to coherence and discourse effectiveness (Zahra, 2021; Liu, 2025).

Equally important is the role of repetition in the construction of meaning within the novel. The repeated occurrence of lexical items such as *quarrel*, *fighting*, and *death* foregrounds major themes of conflict, insecurity, fear, and communal instability. By repeatedly drawing attention to these lexical items, the narrative ensures that these concerns remain salient throughout the discourse and intensifies their emotional significance. Furthermore, repetition contributes to the emotional intensity of the narrative while strengthening textual coherence. This observation is consistent with the findings of Machfudi (2022), who reported that lexical recurrence remains one of the most effective mechanisms for maintaining continuity and reinforcing thematic concerns in discourse.

Beyond the analysis of individual lexical relations, the findings support recent studies which argue that lexical cohesion functions beyond textual linkage and contributes significantly to coherence, meaning construction, and discourse organization across literary,

academic, and media texts (Alyouse, 2021; Liu, 2025; Mohammed, 2026). The study also aligns with contemporary Systemic Functional Linguistics research emphasizing that cohesion and coherence are interconnected dimensions of discourse quality and meaning-making (Kawabata, 2025; Putrilestari, 2026). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that lexical cohesion in *Beneath the Rubble* functions not merely as a structural feature but as a powerful discourse-semantic resource that contributes to textual organization, thematic development, ideological representation, and socio-cultural meaning construction.

A closer examination of the above analysis reveals that semantic opposition constitutes the dominant cohesive strategy in the novel. The predominance of antonymy suggests that the narrative is structured around oppositional concepts such as domination and subordination, peace and conflict, destruction and reconciliation, as well as good and evil. These oppositional structures, in turn, reflect the social and ideological tensions that characterise the fictional community of Agigah and contribute significantly to the thematic organization of the narrative.

Further analysis indicates that antonymy functions beyond the establishment of semantic contrast. Through lexical oppositions such as *slave/master*, *sympathy/spite*, and *death noose/love knot*, the novelist foregrounds issues of power relations, communal divisions, social inequality, and eventual reconciliation. As a result, these lexical contrasts create cohesive ties across the discourse while simultaneously reinforcing the novel's major thematic concerns.

Similarly, the use of synonymy demonstrates the novelist's effort to sustain semantic continuity through lexical variation. Expressions such as *union/bond* and *amicability/harmony* reinforce themes of unity, peace, and social restoration. By employing

synonymous lexical items, the novelist avoids unnecessary repetition while maintaining continuity of meaning and thematic coherence throughout the narrative. Consequently, synonymy serves both cohesive and stylistic functions within the discourse.

The instances of repetition identified in the study further underscore the centrality of conflict and insecurity in the novel. The repeated lexical items *quarrel*, *fighting*, and *death* continually direct readers' attention to the devastating effects of violence and social instability. Moreover, their recurrence creates lexical chains that connect different sections of the narrative and reinforce the emotional intensity of the discourse. Thus, repetition functions as an effective mechanism for sustaining thematic focus and narrative coherence.

Collectively, the identified lexical cohesive devices contribute significantly to textual organization, thematic development, and meaning construction in *Beneath the Rubble*. The findings demonstrate that lexical cohesion is not merely a linguistic mechanism for linking textual elements but also a discourse-semantic resource through which social realities, ideological positions, and cultural experiences are represented. Ultimately, through the strategic deployment of antonymy, synonymy, and repetition, Betiang constructs a coherent narrative that explores gender inequality, communal conflict, power struggles, social transformation, and reconciliation within the community of Agigah.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that lexical cohesive devices perform functions that extend beyond the establishment of textual continuity in *Beneath the Rubble*. More importantly, the identified devices contribute significantly to ideological and socio-cultural representation within the narrative. The predominance of antonymy suggests that Betiang conceptualises social reality through oppositional structures that reflect the ideological tensions

embedded within the community of Agigah. Lexical oppositions such as *slave/master*, *good/evil*, and *death noose/love knot* portray a society characterised by inequality, conflict, and moral contradictions. Consequently, these oppositional patterns enable the novelist to foreground the struggle between domination and liberation, hostility and reconciliation, as well as destruction and renewal. Thus, antonymy functions not merely as a cohesive device but also as a powerful means of representing the social and ideological conflicts that shape both individual and communal experiences.

In a similar manner, the extensive use of synonymy demonstrates the novelist's effort to maintain semantic continuity while elaborating thematic concerns from multiple perspectives. Through synonymous expressions such as *union/bond* and *amicability/harmony*, the narrative emphasises the possibility of social cohesion, communal restoration, and peaceful coexistence. As a result, synonymy contributes simultaneously to textual coherence, stylistic enrichment, and thematic reinforcement. Furthermore, by presenting related concepts through lexical variation, the novelist sustains reader engagement while strengthening the semantic interconnectedness of the discourse.

Equally significant is the role of repetition in the novel. The recurrence of lexical items such as *quarrel*, *fighting*, and *death* reveals the author's preoccupation with conflict, violence, insecurity, and their consequences for communal life. These repeated lexical items function as discourse markers that continually direct readers' attention to the devastating effects of hostility and social instability. In addition, their recurrence creates lexical chains that strengthen narrative coherence while reinforcing the emotional and ideological significance of the novel's central concerns. Accordingly, repetition serves as both a cohesive and rhetorical strategy through which key themes are foregrounded and sustained throughout the narrative.

Taken together, the overall distribution of lexical cohesive devices indicates that semantic opposition constitutes the dominant cohesive strategy in the novel. The predominance of antonymy suggests that the narrative is structured around oppositional concepts such as domination and subordination, peace and conflict, tradition and change, as well as destruction and reconciliation. Meanwhile, synonymy and repetition complement this pattern by reinforcing thematic continuity and maintaining semantic coherence throughout the discourse. Collectively, these lexical relations contribute to the organization of meaning and facilitate readers' interpretation of the novel's major socio-cultural concerns.

These findings are consistent with recent studies which argue that lexical cohesion functions beyond textual linkage and contributes significantly to coherence, meaning construction, and discourse organization across literary, academic, and media texts (Alyouse, 2021; Liu, 2025; Mohammed 2026). The study also aligns with contemporary Systemic Functional Grammar scholarship emphasizing that cohesion and coherence are interconnected dimensions of discourse quality and communicative effectiveness (Kawabata, 2025; Putrilestari, 2026). Moreover, these observations support González's (2018) argument that lexical cohesion operates as a discourse-semantic resource through which writers construct thematic and ideological meanings. Likewise, the findings corroborate the observations of Zahra (2021) and Machfudi (2022), who maintain that lexical cohesive devices contribute significantly to textual organization, coherence, and meaning-making across different discourse genres.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that lexical cohesion performs textual, thematic, stylistic, and ideological functions in *Beneath the Rubble*. Through antonymy, synonymy, and repetition, Betiang successfully constructs a coherent narrative that explores issues of gender inequality, communal conflict, power relations, moral contradictions, social transformation, and reconciliation.

Therefore, the study reinforces the view that linguistic choices are central to literary meaning and that discourse analysis provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, literature, ideology, and society.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have important theoretical, literary, and pedagogical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study reinforces Halliday and Hasan's (1976) proposition that lexical cohesion is fundamental to textuality and meaning construction. The findings demonstrate that lexical cohesive devices extend beyond their traditional role of linking textual elements and function as discourse-semantic resources through which thematic concerns, ideological positions, and socio-cultural meanings are communicated.

From a literary standpoint, the study reveals that lexical cohesion constitutes an important stylistic resource in *Beneath the Rubble*. Through antonymy, synonymy, and repetition, Betiang effectively constructs thematic continuity and represents complex social realities such as gender inequality, communal conflict, power struggles, and reconciliation. Consequently, the findings demonstrate that literary meaning emerges not only from thematic content but also from the linguistic choices through which such themes are articulated.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings highlight the relevance of discourse analysis and cohesion studies in language and literature education. Understanding how lexical cohesive devices function within texts can enhance students' reading comprehension, critical interpretation, and writing skills. Therefore, the study supports the integration of discourse analytical approaches into the teaching of stylistics, literary criticism, discourse analysis, and language studies.

Conclusion

This study examined lexical cohesive devices in Liwhu Betiang's novel *Beneath the Rubble* with particular emphasis on antonymy, synonymy, and repetition. The findings reveal that lexical cohesion functions as an important discourse-semantic resource through which textual continuity, thematic development, and socio-cultural meanings are achieved. Antonymy emerged as the most dominant lexical cohesive device, followed by synonymy and repetition. Furthermore, these devices contribute significantly to the representation of gender relations, communal conflict, power structures, moral contradictions, and social transformation within the novel.

In addition, the study reinforces the assertion of Halliday and Hasan (1976) that lexical cohesion is fundamental to textuality while extending contemporary understanding of lexical cohesion as a resource for ideological and thematic meaning construction. By applying discourse analytical insights to a contemporary Nigerian novel, the study contributes to discourse studies, literary linguistics, and African literary scholarship. Consequently, the research broadens existing knowledge of how lexical relations function within literary discourse. The study opines that literary critics should complement thematic analyses with linguistic investigations in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of literary texts. Meanwhile, language educators should emphasise the teaching of lexical cohesion because of its importance in reading comprehension, writing development, and discourse interpretation.

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