The present study is a qualitative analysis of reference items in six agricultural texts of the factual genre with a heuristic or descriptive objective. It identifies patterns and relationships among reference items, and determines their contribution to cohesion. Halliday’s and Hasan’s principles are applied to identify cohesive reference items and to calculate their percentage occurrence in each text.

The findings suggest that the major flaw in Halliday-Hasan’s principles (1976) on reference items lies in their rejection of reference within the sentence. This weakness is explained by Martin’s reference chains (1992), which indicate that reference items can retrieve information through forward as well as backward referenced in the same sentence, thereby denoting that the percentage values of cohesive items would be considerably higher if this aspect had been considered in Halliday-Hasan’s method.

The factual genre [and especially the agricultural field] was chosen for this study because of the relatively limited amount of research done on it.

It is hoped that the insights gained from this study may help learners, teachers, and researchers of English as a Second Language, who are specializing in a scientific discipline, at secondary and tertiary level.