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Cohesion: A Fundamental Element in Writing English Texts

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Abstract

This paper is devoted for discussing cohesion as a main element in writing English texts with now and then reference to coherence since the two terms are closely interrelated components. Therefore, the researchers try to distinguish between cohesion and coherence by stating the differences between them.

Cohesion means the way or the process of connecting two sentences together, whereas coherence, on the other hand, indicates the clarity of meaning and balance of a piece of writing or a text. This research focuses on the nature of grammatical cohesion in English by demonstrating its chief function. A real attempt is made to identify the types and divisions of cohesion.

Keywords: cohesion, coherence, text, function.

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التلاصق النحوي كعنصر رئيسي في كتابة النصوص الأنكليزية

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الملخص : هذه الدراسة مكرسة لمناقشة (التلاصق النحوي) (Cohesion) كعنصر رئيسي في كتابة النصوص الأنكليزية مع الإشارة للتلاحم الدلالي (Coherence) أحياناً لأن الاصطلاحين مرتبطين أرتباطاً وثيقاً في الأنكليزية، لذا يحاول الباحثان التمييز بين الأصطلاحين بتحديد الفروقات بينهما.

يعني التلاصق النحوي (Cohesion) طريقة أو عملية ربط جملتين سوية بينما يشير التلاحم الدلالي (Coherence) الى وضوح المعنى والتوازن للنص. يركز البحث على طبيعة التلاصق النحوي (Cohesion) في اللغة الأنكليزية وذلك بأظهار وظيفته الرئيسية. قام الباحثان بمحاولة حقيقية لتحديد وشرح أنواع وأقسام الـ(Cohesion).

الكلمات المفتاحية: التلاصق النحوي، التلاحم الدلالي، النص، الوظيفة .

1. Introduction

Cohesion plays a functional part in relating ideas and concepts to each other. Experience in teaching English for long period asserts that learners' of English knowledge of cohesion and coherence is about to be less than little.

It is necessary to note that cohesion is studied within domain of syntax. On the other hand, coherence has a semantic role in the language. In other words, coherence is a semantically-oriented issue. So Coherent texts flow logically making it easy for the readers to understand what is being said. Or, more precisely, it a state or situation in which all parts or ideas fit together well so that they form a unified whole.

The research starts with an introduction following the abstract. The introduction represents an independent section. Section (2) implies: an outline of cohesive devices, definition of cohesion and coherence, function of cohesion besides the titles: lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion which contains several subtitles. Finally, the study reveals a number of conclusions which are cited in the third section of the research.

The introduction has the following subsections: statement of the problem, aims to be attained, hypothesis, procedure and importance of the research.

1.1   Statement of the problem

As is mentioned previously, cohesion has a functional duty in connecting ideas and thoughts in a logical and reasonable way.

Learners of English are often unaware practically of the proper way to link sentences together. They, however, encounter difficulty in arranging sentences logically. As long-time teachers of English, the researchers have discovered that the learners suffer from hardships in realizing the differences between cohesion and coherence.

1.2 Aims to Be Attained

The study aims at giving the learners some fundamental ideas about cohesion in English and the function of cohesion is clearly shown by identifying the logical sequence of ideas within sentences.

1.3 Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that:

a. The learners of English are usually unaware of the concepts of cohesion and coherence.

b. They can't do the logical linkages of sentences in writing texts.

c. Unknowing of these concepts results in bad writing on the part of the learners; in the sense, their writing are always grammatically inaccurate and logically lacking.

1.4 Procedure

The pursued procedures in this paper are, as follows:

1. The data are collected from English books on the subject. These data are sorted out according to the paper's needs.

2. The data are analysed as far as cohesion is concerned with reference to coherence occasionally.

3. Selected essays about cohesion are compared in order to have clarity about the term and obtain better understanding of it.

4. Instructors of English of different scientific ranks are asked to share their thoughts on the subject of the paper.

1.5 Importance of the Research

The present study can be of a great value to show the role of cohesion in comprehending the implicit meaning of the sentence and how the text is affected by it. This paper is useful for the researchers in the field of linguistics, the text-book writers besides the learners of English at advanced stages. It can be useful too, in the teaching applications.

2. An Outline of Cohesive Devices

Newmark (1988: 176) declares that even the translator should depend on the various resources of the language which ensure the cohesion of thought beyond what is said in the sentence. Repetition as a common device is one of the important devices that give help in joining information together in order to make an acceptable text and this can be done through cohesive relations. Under this title, the cohesive devices are in advance reviewed. They are besides repetition, reference which can be signaled by pronouns, substitution by use of paraphrases, ellipsis that is achieved by deleting material which can easily be reached and obtained from the sentence or text. And conjunction includes words, such as: like, but etc. which are used to connect sentences besides the lexical relations, i.e., words with grammatically-related meanings (Fasold, 2006:185). Some of these devices though they are described as cohesion means exit within texts. Some types of cohesive ties can be felt in the following lines:

"My father once bought a Lincoln Convertible. He did by saving penny he could. That car would be worth a fortune nowadays. However, he sold it to help pay for my college edition. Sometimes, I think I'd rather have the convertible."

(Yule, 1996:140)

2.1 Definition of Cohesion

Over the past years, a considerable bulk of linguistic search is allocated for studying cohesion as one of two elements of making a good text.

Cohesion has indispensable importance in the knowledge of English and even in other languages though each language has its own particular patterns through which interrelationships of person and events are conveyed. Therefore, in the case of translation. which should necessarily be understood by its readers requires that such patterns ought not to be affected or violated under any conditions.

Halliday and Hasan (1976: 4) suggest that "cohesion is the semantic relations that exist within the text, and characterize it as such. Cohesion is achieved where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another." So the semantics of a text is negatively affected if the linkage of sentences is bad.

Singh points out cohesion as "the property that distinguishes a sequence of sentences that form a discourse from a random sequence of sentences." (Singh, 1979 cited in Kalil, 2008:6)

It is concluded that improper sequences of sentences result in a random text which is semantically - incomprehensible.

2.2 Definition of Coherence

Vandijk (1997: 95) forwards his definition of coherence by saying "the coherence relations holding between propositions are expressed by composite sentences and sequences of sentences."

The term coherence means "handling together", if the sequence of parts in any text is arranged in the right way; in the sense each sentence depends on the previous one or, in other words, it is related to the preceding one; then, the text can be described as coherent and the whole work is clear with no room of confusion to the readers.

For more explanations of this term, all linguists agree that coherence indicates the unity of a text in which the underlying semantic relations are inclusive with their proper share to the total theme of discourse. In other words, the sentences of a text must have a semantic element of consistency,i.e., each sentence must agree with the previous sentences in the text. The following passage lacks coherence, i.e., incoherent.

Linda lives in a house next to Flex's. Flex has a goatie. She made a journey. It was a rainy day yesterday.

The sentences in the above passage are formed with correct grammar; but the text is clearly odd and in regard to semantics these sentences are unrelated. This passage overall seems strange. Coherence is something that is not found in the language, but it is something that exists in people who play an important role to make themselves understood in writing and in speech. They must care for what they speak and write so that hearers and readers find no difficulty in reaching full comprehension. Otherwise, if there are flaws in a certain text, the reader sometimes finds himself obliged in bridging the gabs which exist in that text.

2.3 Functional View of Cohesion

When a text is a unified whole through using proper cohesive unity structure and it is semantically-coherent, so these features distinguish a real text from a group of unrelated sentences. Even that cohesion includes semantic elements for connecting a sentence with what has been said before. It is worth mentioning that cohesion is textual phenomenon, whereas coherence is identified to be a mind one.

In line with this thought, cohesion and coherence are largely related and the linguistic devices of cohesion, moreover, are tailored to indicate coherence meanings. In reality, the difference between the two concepts is that coherence can work without cohesion, but not the opposite. In other words, coherence can work alone to give understood meaning with no need to cohesion since. As is said earlier, the meaning of a passage is sometimes comprehended, even if the text is not linked in a good way concerning its grammar. A speech or a passage with a large amount of devices is not always coherent. The following passage is unacceptable though its grammar is right.

Father was home. Home is here. Here is there. There was mother.

In this passage, the last word of one sentence is repeated at the start of the next sentence. Inappropriate repetition is faced in the four-sentence example. This group of sentences is without linguistic aim. Cohesion mostly does not concern for the meaning of a text. It rather concerns about the grammatical construction of a text. Cohesion helps create text in right grammar, however.

Baker (1992:180) signifies that "the function of cohesion is the pack of lexical and grammatical relations which reserve unity between the text's various parts. Upon such relations of the text, it heavily depends."

Once the reader intends to know interpretation of some hard words of a text, this can be realized through finding words and expressions in the sentences and paragraphs mentioned in other places of the same text. Sometimes some words need to be looked up in a dictionary.

2.4 Types of Cohesion

Linguists refer to two types of cohesion in English: lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion. This paper mainly focuses on the second type with now and then mention to lexical cohesion.

2.4.1 Lexical Cohesion

Modern trends in linguistics stress the importance of a text in daily Communication. The effective role of a text in communication often cannot be realised through a single sentence. A text, therefore, as stated earlier, is the unit used in communication whether it is written or verbal. Anyhow, lexical cohesion has a crucial contribution in forming a text as one of the basic elements of cohesion. Lexical cohesion takes place when two words in a text are semantically related in some way. In other words, they are related in term of their meaning. Lexical cohesion refers to the reader who perceives the unity of text achieved through the author's usage of words with related meaning. Lexical cohesion is the linkage between parts of a passage in order to gain a cohesive unity of structure, i.e., lexical cohesion concerns about the cohesive unity of structure. But lexical cohesion concerns, too, of the meaning in text. Besides it concerns the ways in which lexical terms relate to each other and to other cohesive devices to reach the final powerful cohesion. This type of cohesion typically works through lexical chains that enter into a text and are connected to each other in various ways.

2.4.2 Grammatical Cohesion

Grammatical cohesion is the linkage between parts of a passage in order to have a cohesive unity of structure. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 27) signals to "cohesion as it is closely related to information structure." Chiefly, the functional textuality teaches writers and linguists to bring sentences together to achieve coherent texts. Functional textuality contributes also to the connectivity of texts with contexts. It is agreed among linguists that grammatical cohesion is clearly manifested through conjunction, substitution, reference and ellipsis. These cohesive devices are used as a means of evaluating the overall cohesive of texts.

2.4.2.1 Conjunction

Cohesion is carried out by use of conjunctions as one of the clearest ways of grammatical cohesion. Conjunctions are words used for the process of linkage. These words can bring together a chain of clauses, sentences or paragraphs.
(Larson, 1984-399)
Halliday and Hasan lay out four kinds of conjunctions in their study.

1-   Additive Conjunctions, for instance: also, or, and
2-   Adversative Conjunctions, for instance: yet, only, but
3-   Causal conjunctions, for instance: so, then
4-   Temporal conjunctions, for instance: first, finally
Habeeb (2006:46) suggests three examples only applicable to the first
three kinds of conjunctions.

1-   Perhaps she missed her train; or else she changed her mind.
2-   I would love to participate; only I don't know how to play.
3-   The weather cleared just as the party approached the summit. Until then, they had seen nothing.
The aim behind using conjunctions is to add extra information to what has been said or to give detail and sometimes examplify it. These words are used to compare new information with old information to show the differences or to insert another side of the discourse. These tools can also connect new information with what has already been mentioned in term of cause and effect and as far as time is concerned.

2.4.2.2 <u>Substitution</u>
Another way of linking sentences together in a text is implemented via the process of substitution which takes place when proforms replace words or elements that exist in the text. Unlike ellipsis, a word or a phrase is not deleted from a sentence, but substituted for another. So proforms are considered as compensating words for what has been mentioned of words or elements previously, e.g.
4. Which piece of cake would you like? I would like the big one.
The word <u>one</u> is used instead of repeating <u>piece of cake</u>. The same could be said about pronouns which replace the noun, for example:

5.   I put the shirt in the washing machine because it was dirty.

<u>shirt</u> is a noun and <u>it</u> is the pronoun which replaces the noun.
Other examples imply substitution.

6.   John already knows. Everybody does.
<u>Does</u> in the second clause replaces the verb <u>knows</u>.

7.   Everybody buys from that grocery store. Even the poor do.
<u>Do</u> in the second sentence replaces <u>buys</u> of the first clause.
It should be noted that word replacement blocks repetition and adds linguistic force to the discourse. Those proforms are always used to refer to previous information or earlier mentioned elements. This way of connecting sentences definitely helps focus on the new information in texts.

2.4.2.3 <u>Ellipsis</u>
Ellipsis is one of the commonest cohesive strategies in writing a coherent passage. It is adopted by writers to create well-knitted texts which are logically related. Ellipsis means deletion part of a sentence on the supposition that the previous discourse clarifies its meaning. It is, indeed, the most commonly way used to avoid repetition and deletion does not affect or violate the overall meaning of the sentence. The full

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meaning is preserved by context. Although a word or a phrase is deleted but the meaning is fully retained. A common example often used in conversation is:

8.   What are you doing? studying.

The full form of the answer would be <u>I am studying</u>. The pronoun and the auxiliary are deleted to avoid repetition.

The crucial reason behind making ellipses is to draw attention to new information by escaping to repeat the previously-mentioned information, e.g.

9.   I have not spoken to that blonde girl, but I will in the future.

in the above sentence the ellipted part of the sentence is equal to the given information that is found in the first clause.

Williams (1989: 47) claims that ellipsis is actually a particular type of substitution, but a lexical item is not replaced by an equivalent word or phrase. He calls it a zero substitution like

10.   Mary cleaned the room. Linda the kitchen.

The verb in the second clause is omitted because it is understood from the overt verb in the preceding clause.

Linguists agree on two types of ellipsis: some ellipses are reliable on linguistic context, as cited below:

11.   I am serious if you are. (serious)
12.   Mary is tidying the room because Linda won't. (tidy the room)

The word <u>serious</u> and the phrase <u>tidy the room</u> are put between brackets to are refer to deletion of linguistic context. The other ellipses are not dependent on context, e.g.

13.   Serves you right - for it serves you right.
14.   Beg you pardon - I beg you pardon.
15.   Sorry, I couldn't be there.
 I am sorry, I couldn't be there.
16.   nice to see you - It's nice to see you.
17.   searching for somebody?
Are you searching for somebody?

2.4.2.4 <u>Reference</u>
<u>Types of Referential devices in text.</u>

1-   Backward reference refers to a word or a phrase used instead of a word or a phrase that has been indicated previously. This is the most common cohesive device in writing texts - This type is given the technical term <u>anaphora</u>.

Three cases of anaphoric reference exist in writing texts. They are:

a.   Using a pronoun instead of aforementioned noun.
b.   Using the definite article to modify a noun which has previously been mentioned with the indefinite article.
c.   Using a synonym or hyponym substituting for an already mentioned word.

The following are three examples referring to the three cases one by one:

18.   My sister is engaged in a phone call. <u>She</u> says <u>she</u> needs the pamphlet that <u>she</u> lent him.
19.   When I sat by the window, I saw a man and a woman engaged in a talk at the house door. <u>The</u> man was wearing a short coat and <u>the</u> woman was carrying a handbag.
20.   There was so much tasty food in the restaurant, but I was supposed to be slimming so I should keep on having a light meal.

For more examples: <u>a taxi driver</u> is replaced by the pronoun <u>he</u> and <u>they</u> replaces <u>two boys.</u>

2-   Forward Reference: This is another common cohesive device which is technically called <u>cataphora</u>. Notice the coming example on cataphoric reference.
21.   Perhaps I shouldn't inform you this, but when she was young she used to wear a full-length skirt.
Cataphoric ties may exist in some sentences connecting up with what comes next. But such uses are very rare and in most cases not necessary to the making of a text, e.g.

22.   This may entertain you. A new bird dealer has reached the town.
23.   It never should have taken place. Five soldiers deserted the fight with the enemy.
The first clause in (22) and (23) provide hints which make the listener think to hear something different. The sentences above include cataphoric ties which prepare listeners or readers to on-coming information.
The referential cohesive devices <u>anaphora</u> and <u>cataphora</u> make what is known textual reference. It is the linguistic reference that refers to items in the preceding sentence or to the following sentence.
It is worth noting that, opposite to textual reference, there is situational reference which usually refers to things outside language.
Besides the references mentioned earlier, there is another reference which can't make cohesion. <u>Exophora</u> is the reference which is only used to describe abstracted ideas without identifying them. This reference is unlike the already mentioned effective references which create cohesion in linking components together. The prefix <u>exo</u> in this term refers to the meaning <u>outside</u>, therefore, persons and events indicated in this way will not be identified by the writer because they are outside the text. This reference is not recognized as a cohesive device because it does not link two components together into a text.

3. <u>Conclusion</u>
Great efforts are exerted for ending this research; moreover, it has required a long time to finish. This study concludes that learners of English often face difficulties in grasping cohesion. In addition, most of them fail to make a reasonable link between sentences of a text or a speech.
The final stage of this paper, however, is allocated for citing important concluded points reached during researching and after its finalisation.
Special points concluded from the research

1.   The fact which has been discovered in the course of writing this paper is that cohesion mainly has two types: grammatical and lexical.
2.   Cohesion is not limited to cohesive devices relations; but is also realised via sequences of tenses. The sentences of a paragraph should be of the same tense throughout, either past or present.
3.   The main grammatical duty of cohesion is to connect the sentences of a paragraph which lead to cohesive genre.
4.   The grammatical tools, such as: words, phrases, conjunctions etc. are utilized for relating sentences of a paragraph and for creating cohesive genre. These devices are mentioned as grammatical cohesion ones.
5.   The main difference between cohesion and coherence has been explained in the body of the research in which the writers of this paper conclude that the former deals with grammatically-oriented forms, whereas the latter deals with semantic aspect of a text.

General points relative to the Subject

1.   It seems to us that cohesion is a necessary aspect for the people in any language because linking sentences in a good way is a pressing need for communication among educated and ordinary people in daily life. Cohesion is, therefore, a common and required phenomenon in any of the world's languages. Communication is broken down and blocked when cohesion is lost in languages of all over the world.

2.   Most learners of English even those at advanced stages ignore the subject of cohesion theoretically and, moreover, they are incompetent practically at linking (sentences together in the right way to make a healthy essay.

3.   They are also unqualified to make essays with correct connected thoughts. Their thoughts are mostly arranged randomly. That is because of the total failure of the process of teaching and learning, pursued at present, in making the learners have an active role in knowing and understanding the subjects of the English Language.

4.   If the grammatical rules of cohesion are violated, the concept of coherence is negatively affected and vice versa. Grammar and semantics are always intermingled components. Both cohesion and coherence are two integral parts because they are highly connected themes. Each concept completes the other.

5.   Incoherent texts mostly cause problems to the degree of risk among people because some texts are semantically wrong and carry reverse meanings and they trigger misunderstanding for the hearer and reader. So, people must not make inaccurate texts and speeches and they must avoid the semantic inexactness of their sentences which must grammatically be constructed and carefully made as well.

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