

COHESION AND SEMANTIC UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to explore the relation between different cohesive devices and semantics of a text. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion consisting of referencing, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion has been applied on a text: "How one thing can contain everything" by Paulo Coelho. How cohesive devices result in semantic linkages among different structural elements at both grammatical and lexical levels has been looked into. A better appreciation of the relationship between cohesive devices and semantics would facilitate second or foreign language learners in developing better semantic comprehension and meaningful flow in target language.

Keywords: Cohesive ties, semantic comprehension, meaningful flow

INTRODUCTION

Text analysis unfolds different functions of language. For Halliday and Hasan (1976) "the notion 'text' is a term used in linguistics to refer to any passage- spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole." A text is a semantic unit; a unit of meaning. Texture is that very quality which converts a text into a cohesive whole.

Cohesion in English is concerned with a relatively neglected part of the linguistic system: its resources for the text construction, the range of the meanings that are specifically associated with relating what is being spoken or written to its semantic environment. A principal component of these resources is 'cohesion'. This paper studies the cohesion that arises from semantic relations between sentences and words.

Bamberg (1983) cites Halliday and Hasan's (1976) definition of cohesion in following words "it is a relationship between two textual elements in which one is interpreted by the author.... Such relationships between words create cohesive "ties" and allow us to differentiate sentences that constitute a "text" from sequences of unrelated sentences".

"A tie refers to a single instance of cohesion, a term for one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items" (Halliday and Hasan 1976/2001: 3). Texture produces semantic unity in a text and transforms it into a unified whole with the help of cohesive relations. According to 'The Concise Oxford dictionary Of Linguistics' by P.H Mathews (1997) "cohesion and coherence are sources which create texture" in a text.

The relation between linguistic elements of a text provides a reader with semantic presupposition. An element presupposes the other which means that the second element cannot be decoded without the first one. Grimes (1975) states that "cohesion . . . has to do with the means of introducing new information and of keeping track of old information."

Holloway (1981) mentions that Halliday and Hasan (1976) observe that every language has certain items that are used as reference. For example, English has these items in the forms of personal, demonstrative, and comparative references. Reference is the most important feature that produces cohesion in any discourse.

Personal references are those items which refer to participants as 'first person,' 'second person,' 'third person'. There is another class of reference which includes: endophoric, exophoric, anaphoric, and cataphoric references. Halliday and Hasan (1976) observe that there are *adverbial*, *demonstratives* and *selective nominal demonstratives*. In *comparative references* they have classified two further types: general comparison and particular comparison (R. Hasan, 1976).

Substitution and ellipsis are used when "a speaker or writer wishes to avoid the repetition of a lexical item and is able to draw on one of the grammatical resources of the language to replace the item" (Bloor, 1995). "Since substitution is a grammatical relation [...] the substitute may function as a noun, as a verb, or as a clause" (R.Hasan, 1976).

There are three classes of substitution and ellipsis. In nominal substitution 'noun' can be substituted mostly as a nominal group's head. In verbal substitution the verbal group's head is substituted that takes place in final position. In clausal substitution, 'so' or 'not' are used to substitute the whole clause. Similarly nominal, verbal, and clausal ellipsis work with nominal, verbal and clausal groups respectively (Ibid).

Holloway (1981) argued that *ellipsis* and *substitution* help students to create a parallel structure as well as balanced sentences in their writing. These cohesive devices enable students to write without any repeating any structure as repetition affects lucidity in a writing structure and reduces (semantic) understanding.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) observe that "conjunction is a different type of semantic relation, one which is no longer any kind of search instruction, but a specification of the way in which what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before." Conjunctions are semantic cohesive relations. They work as "cohesive ties between clauses or sections of text in such a way as to demonstrate a meaningful pattern between them" (Bloor & Bloor, 1995).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify four kinds of conjunctions; additive, adversative, temporal and casual. In additive conjunction, they count the words "and, also, too, furthermore, additionally," which coordinate with the presupposed item (Ibid). However, adversative conjunction means "opposite to expectations" and these are specified by words like "yet, though, only, but, in fact, rather" (Ibid). Causal conjunctions are used to express "result, reason and purpose." Examples of causal conjunctions include: "so, then, for, because, for this reason, as a result, in this respect, etc." Temporal conjunctions are used for signifying "time and sequence." Examples include "then, next, after that, next day, until then, at the same time, at this point" (Ibid).

Joseph Williams and Rosemary Hake (1979) have used Halliday and Hasan's conjunctive devices by devising some exercises of complex as well as relational sentences. It was meant to determine their relative semantic effect in students' writings. Results finally verify that use of conjunctive devices is very much helpful in developing semantic writing abilities of students.

Lexical cohesion is "the cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 274). It works in relation with non-grammatical linguistic elements. It has further two types: reiteration and collocation. (Holloway, 1981)

In Reiteration, a lexical item is repeated directly, by using synonyms, or any other related word. They explain reiteration as "one lexical item referring back to another, to which it is related by having a common referent. A reiterated item may be a repetition, a synonym, a superordinate, or a general word." Collocation is used to refer to those lexical items which are usually found together in a similar text (R. Hasan, 1976).

A text comprises different linguistic items which form a unified whole. The semantic wholeness of text is a major resource for the concept of cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1976) argue that cohesion is related to meaningful relations between linguistic items of a text. These semantic relations in a text transform it into a semantic unit. The present paper aims to investigate the relation between cohesive functions and semantics of a text in developing meaningful understanding of a text.

METHODOLOGY

Halliday and Hasan (1976) have classified cohesive ties into five categories: referencing, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Referencing, Substitution, Ellipses and Conjunctions are grammatical cohesive ties whereas lexical cohesion is non-grammatical in nature.

The present research is an explorative study and uses a text by Paulo Coelho, "How one thing can contain everything," for analyzing the textual meanings extracted through the semantic concept of cohesion. The principles of referencing, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion presented by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and T. Bloor and M. Bloor (1995) are used in this analysis to highlight the significance of cohesive ties in the text which form its semantic base. All clauses in the story have numbered for numerical identification. Cohesive devices were also dealt with in chronological order by assigning each one a separate category of analysis. All devices were first identified and then placed under the relevant category.

ANALYSIS

Analysis With Respect To References

Nunan (1993) believes that references are those types of cohesive devices in any text that refer either to some interpreted item within the text or sometime outside the text. Halliday and Hasan (1976) argue that references are those linguistic items that can be interpreted with reference to the overall context of a text or conversation. References used in a text create inquisitiveness in a reader's mind and also help in developing meaningful connections between various structural parts and generate a comprehensible flow of thought in a text which in turn enhances its semantic understanding.

In the text under review, "How one thing can contain everything," there is an anaphoric reference in line 22, "the same universe," which refers back to "the whole universe" in line 5. Similarly "the same street" in lines 18 and 21 are anaphorically referring to "a street in Greenwich village" in line 12. The phrase "good image" in line 7 is a cataphoric reference to the phrase "lovely image" in line 23.

In the selected text there are eighteen instances of personal pronouns. The personal pronoun "he" is used five times; four times it referred to the main protagonist of the story, "the painter" and once to "someone" in line 12. The personal pronoun "we" is used twice and "our" is used once in the text to refer to supposed people in the meeting and to the painter. These personal pronouns have also been used exophorically to address everyone. The pronoun "I" is used twice to refer to "a Sao Paulo-born painter." The pronoun "us" is used thrice to refer to [supposed people in] the meeting, everyone, and the painter in the text. The pronoun "you" is used once for "everyone" within the text. It is also used as an exophoric reference. The pronoun "its" in line 6 refers back to "the whole universe" in line 5 and "it" in line 20 refers back to "several squares in the paper/holes" in line 19. Out of eighteen instances

of personal pronouns, the possessive pronoun “his” in line 10 is used to refer back to “the painter” in line 9.

In the selected text there are twenty five instances of demonstrative pronouns. Out of these twenty five instances, nineteen times the determiner “the” has been used. Out of these nineteen occurrences, the determiner ‘the’ has specified the dominating role of “the painter” thrice; twice it refers to “window” and “paper” which highlight these objects’ metaphysical importance in the story; while, thrice it refers to two linguistic items “the street” and “the same whole universe.” The use of “the” with other relevant objects in the text is helpful in understanding their semantic significance in relation to the whole story. The use of “there” in line 16 is directed back to an important object “the window.”

The use of demonstrative “that” is helpful in keeping track of information. For example, in line 5, it connects explanation of the “alchemical idea” with “well-being” of people. In line 8 “that” are significantly related to the “best image” with the “point of view” of the painter.

There are two instances of comparative references in the story. These references are used to show likeness between objects and to realize their comparative semantic implication. For example, “no longer” in line 14 and “what would he see” in lines 16 and 17 show the reduced transparency of the window after it has been covered with paper as compared to its earlier position but, afterwards, by making small holes in the paper it was as good as before. Symbolically, these holes draw attention towards an individual world of every human being that he/she has made out of “the same universe.”

Analysis With Respect To Substitution and Ellipsis

There are no major instances of substitution in the story except at an allegorical level where the whole universe is substituted with small holes in the paper which stand as individual worlds of every human being in the same universe. However, there are two instances of clausal ellipsis in lines 11, 16, and 17. The clause ‘What can you see?’ is an elliptical expression as the complete answer could be ‘(you can see/I can see (∅) ‘A street in Greenwich village)’ rather than ‘A street in Greenwich village’ as given in the text. Similarly, the clause ‘What would he see?’ in lines 16 and 17 is an elliptical expression because the reply could be ‘(He would see (∅) the same street)’ rather than “the same street” as stated in the text. Such elliptical devices provide a reader with an aphoristic thoughtful semantic understanding of the text.

Analysis With Respect To Conjunctions

There are several instances of conjunctions in the selected text. This device helps in creating semantic links among differing parts of the text which facilitates Paulo Coelho to ensure semantic flow of thought in the very text. The additive conjunction “and” is used four times to link information. For example “and” in line 3 connect “We are talking about angles ...about alchemy.” The adversative conjunction “but” is used once in line 7 packing the information that is opposite to expected results in lines 6 and 7 “I struggle to find.../...cannot come up...”

Four instances of causal conjunctions are also found in the text. They specify cause-and-effect relation between different sentences. The causal conjunction “so” is used twice while “therefore” and “then” are each used once. In line 14 “so” links “...the street can...” back to “The painter sticks...” Similarly, in line 21 “so,” “Just as.../...each of us contains...” semantically connects with lines 20 to 22. The use of “therefore” in line 5 “...that we are/...responsible for...” emphasizes the effect of alchemical ideas on the well-being of an individual world.

The temporal conjunction “then” is used in line 14 “...be seen/...with a penknife...” to demonstrate the sequential working of the painter in covering the window pane to convey his personal viewpoint to the people in the meeting.

Analysis With Respect To Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion in the forms of similar, near, and repetitive terms is also found throughout the text. The appendix contains a table which shows the generalization of the word list that helps to achieve lexical cohesiveness in the text. The phrase “the painter” is repeated in lines 1, 9, 13, and 19 and the word “street” in lines 12, 14, 18, and 21. The use of such identical words adds to the uniformity and collective semantic understanding of the text. Similarly, there is a repetition of words including: paper, window, alchemy, and image in the text.

A uniform employment of proper nouns is also observed in the text: “A Sao Paulo-born painter/New York/ Greenwich village”. Lexical cohesiveness is also noted in the form of terms used to show quantity “Small/several/squares/a piece.” Tools which provide semantic unity to the structure have been used throughout the text. These are: “Paper/penknife/cuts/holes/squares/sticks.”

The use of grammatical phrases which help in creating cohesion through grammatical collocation has also been observed in the selected text. For example, “come up” in line 7, “look out” in line 10, and “look through” in line 16. This cohesive tie has provided the writer ample opportunity to achieve sequencing flow of thought to generate semantic unity of the text.

CONCLUSION

The present paper investigates the relation between cohesive functions and semantics of a text in developing meaningful understanding of a text. The analysis reveals that Paulo Coelho has employed those cohesive techniques in his work to achieve unity of flow in thoughts that in turn enhances the semantic perceptiveness of the particular text for its readers. Cohesive ties also help ensure better comprehension.

In the Pakistani context, this analysis has implications for both reading comprehension and second language learning as learners of English mostly have rich theoretical knowledge i.e. of grammar but remain unable in functional application of this knowledge. The pedagogical significance of the study lies in using of the cohesion model as a teaching tool with particular emphasis on lexico-grammar patterns to facilitate learners in improving their semantic understanding.

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APPENDIX-I

Table 1. Personal references in “How one thing can contain everything”

<i>Line No</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Line Reference No</i>	<i>Referenced Item</i>
2	We	1	(Supposed people in) meeting and painter
3	I	1	“A Sao Paulo-born painter”
4	Us	1	(Supposed people in) meeting and painter
5	We	1	(Supposed people in) meeting and painter
6	Its	5	“The whole universe”
6	I	1	“A Sao Paulo-born painter”
8	My	1	“A Sao Paulo-born painter”
10	His	9	The painter
11	You	10	Every one
11	He	9	The painter
15	He	9,13	The painter
17	He	16	Someone
20	It	19,20	“Several squares in the paper”/holes
21	Us	1,10	(Supposed people in) meeting, Everyone, painter
22	Our	1,10	(Supposed people in) meeting, Everyone, painter
22	He	1,9,13,19	The painter
23	Us	1,10	(Supposed people in) meeting, Everyone, painter
23	He	1,9,13,19	The painter

Table 2. Comparative references in “How one thing can contain everything”

<i>Line No</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Line Reference No</i>	<i>Referenced Item</i>
14	No longer	13,14	“A piece of paper over the window..”/the street cannot be seen
16,17	“What would he see”	13-16	Through paper covered window rather than plain window
14	Then	14-15	Just as.../. each of us contains...

Table 3. Demonstrative references “How one thing can contain everything”

<i>Line No</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Line Reference No</i>	<i>Referenced Item</i>
1	The house	1	House
3,4	“The other guests”	4	Other/ guests
4	“The alchemical idea”	4	Alchemical/ idea
4	That	4	“Alchemical idea...each of us”
5	“The whole universe”	5	Whole universe
5	That	5	“Whole universe.... we are”
6,7	“The right words”	7	Right words
8	That	7,8	“A good image..will explain”
9	The painter	9	Painter
10	The window	10	Window
13	The painter	13	Painter
13	The window	13	Window
14	That	14	“So..the street”
14	The street	14	Street
15	The paper	15	Paper
16	There	13	The window
18	“The same street”	12	“A street in Greenwich village”
18	The reply	18	Reply
19	The painter	19	Painter
19	The paper	19	Paper
20	These	20	Holes
20,21	“The whole view”	21	Whole view
21	“The same street”	21	Same street
22	“The same universe”	22	Same universe
23	“The lovely image”	23	Lovely image

Table 4. Conjunctions in “How one thing can contain everything”

<i>Additive conjunctions</i>			
<i>Line No</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Line Reference No</i>	<i>Referenced Item</i>
3	And	2-3	We are taking..... /..... About alchemy
5	And	5	.. The whole universe../that we are..
16	And	13-16	The painter sticks../..If someone were to
23	And	20-23	Just as.... /...all of us....
<i>Adversative Conjunctions</i>			
7	But	6-7	I struggle../...cannot come up...
<i>Causal Conjunctions</i>			
5	Therefore	5-6	...That we are/.... responsible for..
14	So	13-14	The painter sticks.... /..the street can...
14	Then	14-15	.. Beseen/..with a penknife..
21	So	20-22	Just as../.. each of us contains...
<i>Temporal Conjunctions</i>			

Table 5. Ellipsis in “How one thing can contain everything”

<i>Line No</i>	<i>Word/Clause + Ellipsis Category</i>	<i>Line Ellipsis No</i>	<i>Elliptical Item</i>
11	‘What can you see?’ (clause)	12	‘(∅) A street in Greenwich village’ (clause)
16-17	‘What would he see?’ (clause)	12	‘(∅) The same street’ (clause)

Verbal Ellipsis: (a) ‘What can you see?’ (clause) he asks.

‘A street in Greenwich village’, someone replies.

Note: There is an elliptical expression in clause ‘(you can see/I can see (∅) ‘A street in Greenwich village’

(b) ‘What would he see?’

‘The same street’ comes the reply.

Note: There is an elliptical expression in clause ‘(He would see (∅) the same street’

<i>Lexical Cohesion Summary</i>	
<i>Painter</i>	Painter/the painter/the painter/the painter
<i>Alchemy</i>	Alchemy/the alchemical
<i>Street</i>	Astreet/the street/the same street/the same street
<i>Window</i>	The window/the window
<i>Universe</i>	The whole universe/the same universe
<i>Paper</i>	A piece of paper/The paper/the paper
<i>Image</i>	Good image/lovely image
<i>Proper nouns</i>	A Sao Paulo-born painter/New York/ Greenwich village
<i>Quantity</i>	Small/several/squares/a piece
<i>Drawing process/tools</i>	Paper/penknife/cuts/holes/squares/sticks

APPENDIX-II**How one thing can contain everything**

1. A meeting in the house of a Sao Paulo-born painter
2. Based in New York. We are talking about angels,
3. And about alchemy. At one point, I try to explain to the
4. Other guests the alchemical idea that each of us contains
5. The whole universe and that we are, therefore,
6. Responsible for its well-being. I struggle to find the
7. Right words, but cannot come up with a good image
8. That will explain my point of view.
9. The painter, who has been listening in silence, asks
10. Everyone to look out of the window of his studio.
11. 'What can you see?' he asks.
12. 'A street in Greenwich Village,' someone replies.
13. The painter sticks a piece of paper over the window
14. So that the street can no longer be seen; then, with a
15. Penknife, he cuts a small square in the paper.
16. 'And if someone were to look through there, what
17. Would he see?'
18. 'The same street,' comes the reply.
19. The painter cuts several squares in the paper.
20. 'Just as each of these holes contains within it the
21. Whole view of the same street, so each of us contains in
22. Our soul the same universe,' he says.
23. And all of us applaud the lovely image he has found.