Doctorate in Education

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"Non-coherent, Cohesive Texts: Extended Abstract"

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Introduction

The present paper draws on the seminal work of Halliday and Hasan (1976) on cohesion. The authors argue that it is cohesive devices that maintain the texture of the text, or that make a text a text, rather than a disconnected sequence of sentences. Following from this, Halliday and Hasan (1976) developed a comprehensive model of cohesive devices that included two main categories: grammatical and lexical cohesive devices. Grammatical cohesive devices include reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunctions, whereas lexical cohesive devices include reiteration of lexical items. The 1976 model has been employed in a plethora of research papers, the majority of which acknowledged the usefulness of cohesive devices in maintaining the text's texture. However, there has been heated controversy apropos the relationship between cohesion and coherence, particularly whether cohesion is a "prerequisite" for meaningful texts.

Purpose

This paper is an attempt to answer the question: Is cohesion an index to text coherence? In many cases, the answer is yes. Nevertheless, the present analysis digs into cases where cohesive devices do not add much to the coherence of the texts. Put differently, some texts are hard to interpret even when they are loaded with cohesive devices. The discussion here addresses texts that have been written with the purpose of not to be understood, yet that are rife with instances of cohesive devices. This paper takes as an example texts that are representative of the Theatre of the Absurd, particularly from Samuel Becket's work. The purpose of the paper is by no means to undermine the significance of cohesive devices, whose importance is acknowledged by countless research papers and studies. On the contrary, the goal of this paper is to highlight the creative dimension of using cohesive devices in complex, not-easy-to-interpret texts in a way that poses conspicuous challenges for readers.

Study design

The paper will be divided into chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

The introductory section includes a general account on the evolvement of cohesive devices. It also addresses the significance of grammatical and lexical cohesion in different types of texts. In addition, the introduction highlights the difference between cohesion and coherence and discusses in general terms the mutual relationship between the two as described by a number of authors and researchers. Finally, this section also presents the main objectives, the rationale and the significance of the current paper.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

The second section of the paper identifies the theoretical framework of cohesive devices. In this section, systemic functional grammar (SFG) theory is thoroughly explained and linked to the concept of cohesion. Of paramount and particular importance to the present study are the three principles of *structure*, *system*, and *metafunctions* of language as introduced by SFG. Distinctions are made between horizontal and vertical connections among linguistic items within texts. Then, the three metafunctions of language, which are the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual are explained, and the discussion smoothly leads to the place of cohesive devices within these functions and within the broader SFG theory.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

Since this paper is about analyzing cohesive devices, the third section introduces the conceptual framework of cohesion, identifying and defining each concept with examples. In this regard, the two major types of reference, *exophoric* and *endophoric*, are illustrated with examples on both types of endophora, namely *cataphora* and *anaphora*. Then, the three types of ellipsis and substitution, which are *nominal*, *verbal* and *clausal*, are explained together, following suit of recent models which tend to merge the once-two categories into one. This section then presents the main types of conjunctions. As far as lexical cohesion is concerned, only direct reiteration, synonymy and antonymy are explained since these three are the most related parts to the goal of the current paper.

Chapter Four: Literature Review

The fourth section of the paper goes through a number of studies on cohesive devices. The literature review particularly focuses on the research papers that have analysed the relationship between cohesion and coherence. Another set of reviewed papers focus on the

connections between cohesive devices and the quality of writing since this is also part of the concept of making meaning. The third set of papers that are reviewed in this section are those which analyse the employment of cohesive devices in literary texts, since this text type is the one under investigation in the present paper.

Chapter Five: Approach and Method

The fifth section of the paper briefly introduces the approach and method of the paper. Since this is an inductive study, the qualitative approach has been espoused, and the method is linguistic analysis. The selected texts, or the sample of the study, have been analysed for instances of cohesive devices that do not lead to coherence. The initial analysis of some excerpts from Becket's *Waiting for Godot*, for example, reveals that cohesive devices are NOT an index for coherence in such types of texts.

Chapter Six: Analysis and Discussion

This part includes the detailed analysis of the selected literary excerpts. Examples of cohesive devices being hard to decode have been spotlighted in the selected literary excerpts in order to build the following argument: undecodable cohesive devices impede coherence. This is quite understandable. Other examples show decodable cohesive devices which do not lead to coherence, which is the main goal of the present study.

Chapter Seven: Pedagogical Implications

The seventh section of the paper will focus on the pedagogical implications and recommendations of the analysis. One of the main implications could be that in the process of teaching academic writing, dimensions of creativity should also be integrated, if not taught directly and explicitly hand in hand with norm-following writing techniques. Much as we expect students to write academically, we should build in them the competence to write in a creative way. The message is: Creative violation of the norm is not an indication of poor-quality writing. On the contrary, learning and exploring role-model texts written by creative writers can be one of the shortest ways towards creativity in writing.